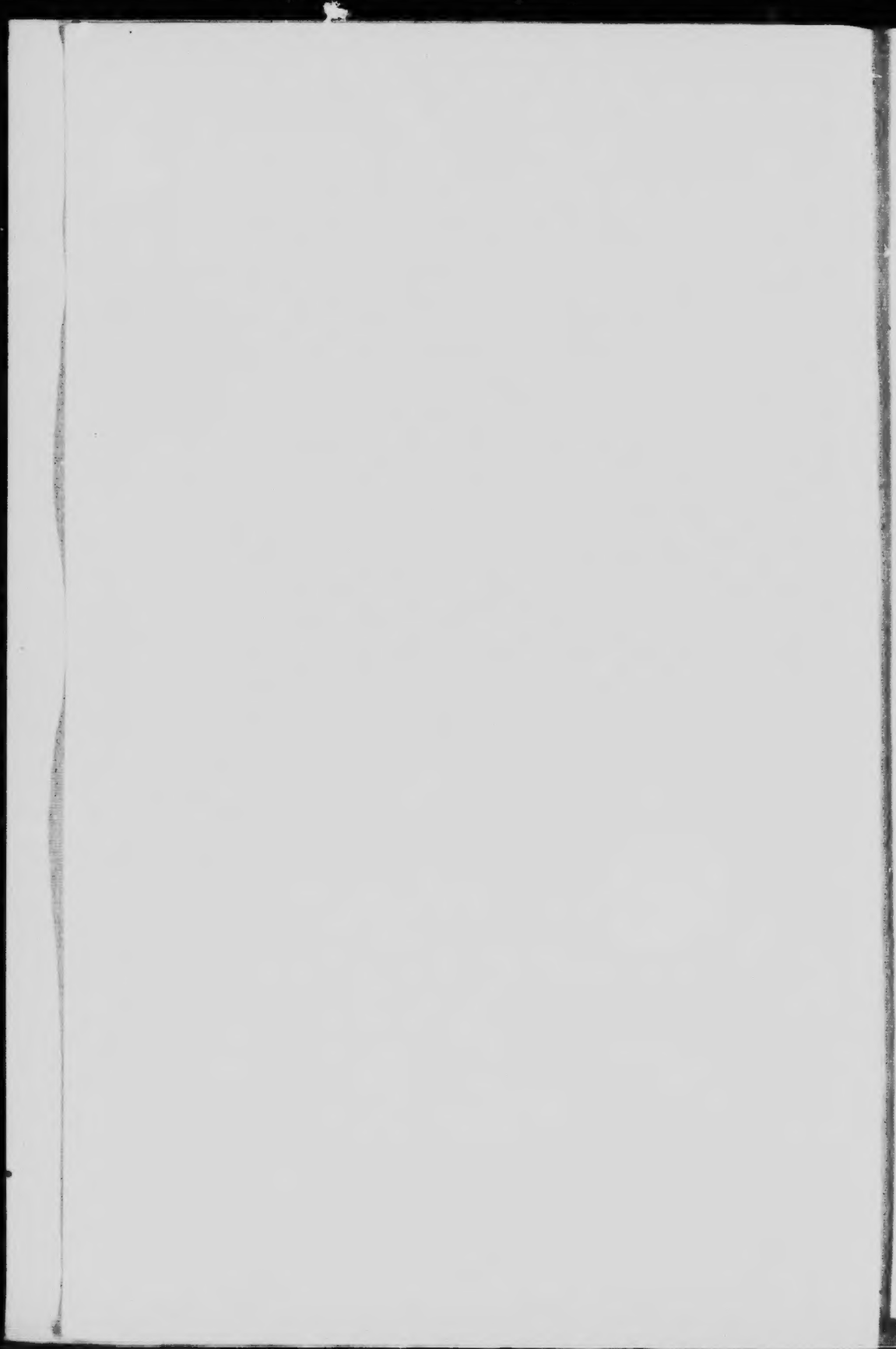




The Life Mask



The Life Mask

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"HE WHO PASSED"
TO M. L. G.

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HENRY FROWDE

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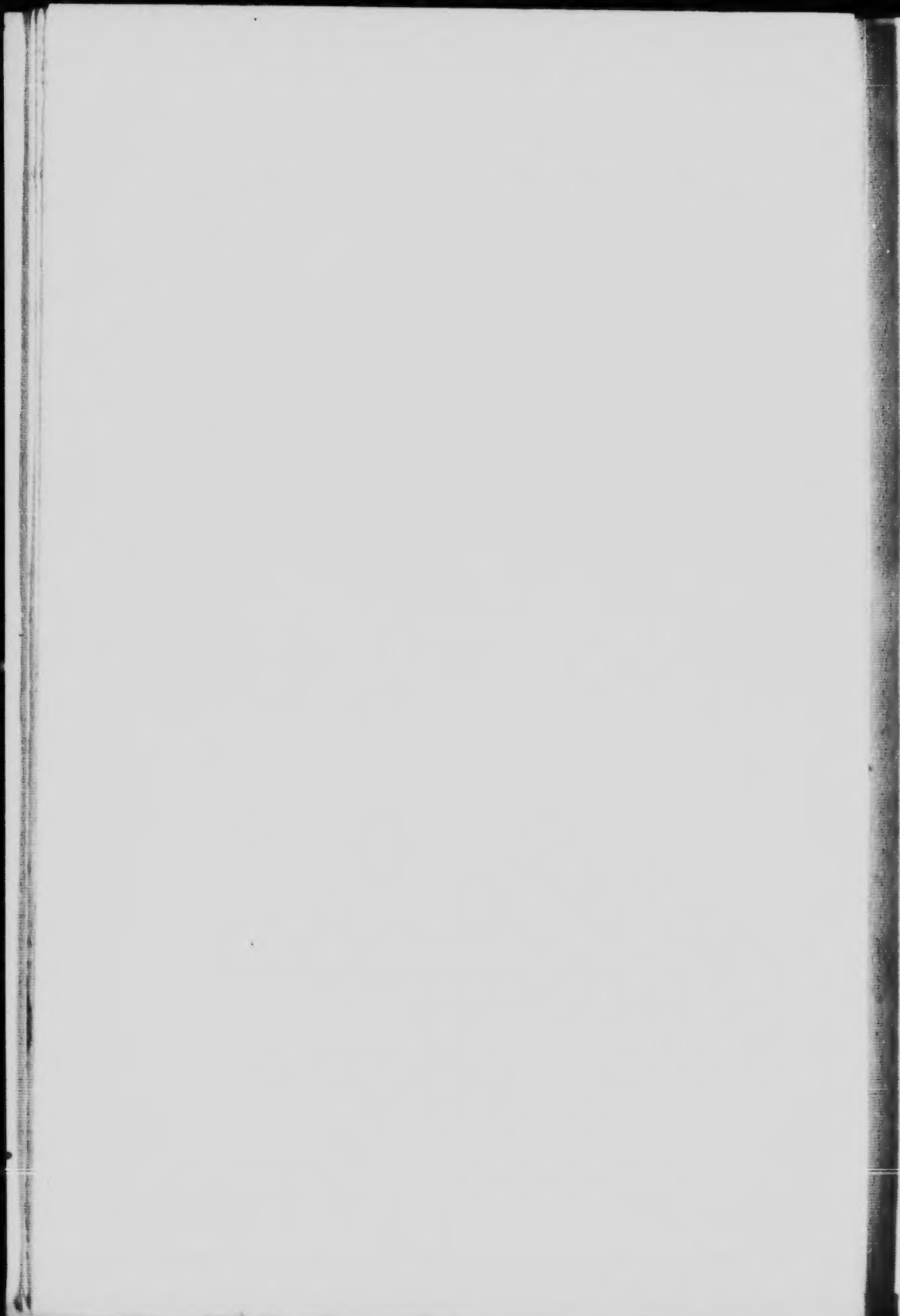
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TO THE CRITICS

IN THE OLD COUNTRY AND THE NEW

WHOSE KIND AND GENEROUS WORDS ABOUT THE BOOK I
WROTE "*HE WHO PASSED*" HELPED ME THROUGH DARK
DAYS TILL BRIGHT ONES CAME. NOW, WHEN I AM ASKED
TO TRY MY HAND AT FICTION, I DEDICATE MY WORK TO
THOSE MEN AND WOMEN WHO, THOUGH THEY MAY NOT
BE AS LENIENT TO THE MADE-UP STORY AS THEY WERE TO
MY REAL STORY, WILL BE JUST. AND I WANT THEM ALL
TO KNOW IT WAS THROUGH ONE OF THEM THAT HAPPINESS
CAME TO ME FROM "*HE WHO PASSED*"



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CHAPTER I

I WAS afraid to fall asleep the night after Sarah Nicholls brought me home to the little house by the sea. I thought, "If I dream the gray dream here, there is no hope for me anywhere."

Nearly every night of the years I wished to forget, the dream had come in the moment of dropping asleep, and I had started up, struggling to shake it off as though it were some remorseless live thing.

I hoped to escape from it while I was ill at the sanatorium, but it found its way there sometimes. If it had come often, I should have died, as every one except Sarah expected me to do.

"I knew you'd get well, dearie," she said. "I prayed every minute. I never stopped prayin'. Whatever I did, there was that prayer behind it, like a kind of undertone. I was sure the Lord wasn't goin' to let you slip away just when He'd give you the chance to be happy."

"The chance to be happy!"

I did not answer when she said that. I could bear to depress her. She had been such an angel to me.

On this night when she tucked me into bed, as she used to do when I was a little girl—little Anita Duprez—I said, "Sarah, do you know I always see you with a halo round your head, like a saint."

"Oh, my dearie, don't say such things to me!" she cried out, as if I had hurt her. "*Me* a saint! Why, I'm nothin' but a worm, a crawlin' worm! What I done, I done not from goodness, but from love. You've bin my life, honey. I reckon there ain't much credit to a body tryin' to save her own life! And now I shan't let my lamb talk any more of that kind o' talk this night. All she's got to think about is that she's well again, an' she's young an' beautiful an' her Sarah worships her; an' she's safe, an' nothing bad can come to her in this little home."

"You mean the dream," I said; for Sarah knew about the gray dream. "No, I'm sure it won't come to me here."

It was true. I felt really sure until she had kissed my hand and had gone tip-toeing out of my room to her own. She would have sat with me, but I didn't wish her to do that. I thought it would be a bad beginning for our new life, so I asked her to go, saying I should sleep more restfully if I knew she were in bed. She left the door ajar, and I could hear her stirring in the room which was very different from the nest she had prepared for me. A creak of the floor told me that she was kneeling down to pray; another, that she was getting up from her knees; then, a faint metallic squeak like the scream of a caught mouse announced that Sarah's form pressed the thin mattress laid upon cheap springs. She had kept her promise, and crept into bed, though it would be long before she could sleep, and in spirit she was with me.

It was comforting to know she was there, loving me with her whole heart; and all my surroundings, brought together by her devotion, were comforting; still, I was afraid the dream might steal in.

"It will be a heavenly sign," I said to myself, "if it doesn't come to me here."

The peace and coziness of the room, each detail of which had been studied by Sarah, made me long to let myself go, to fall deliciously asleep, yet the terror kept plucking at my sleeve whenever my eyes closed, wrenching me awake. By and by the wish to sleep passed. It was as if an electric light had been turned on in my brain, and I was willing to lie awake defying the dream. "You see, you can't come now," I said to it, where it waited.

I began to feel an exquisite pleasure in the night lamp, with its thick blue glass dome. It was a luxury, as it had been at the sanatorium, after endless dark nights. I knew why Sarah had thought of it for me. She thought of everything.

The linen of the pillow-case and sheets was fine as silk and cool as silver, and smelt of lavender. The pillow was made of down; the blankets were light and fleecy; the bed was wide and soft to lie on. There were no shrill complainings of springs when I moved. The furniture was painted white with blue medallions in imitation of Wedgwood designs, an odd idea for furniture, but it was the sort of thing which Sarah would expect me to admire. Its frail, meretricious daintiness was pathetic; and the blue carpet with white roses, and the white muslin curtains tied back with bows of blue ribbon were pathetic too.

I could see all the features of the room in the moonv blue dusk. The night lamp on the mantelpiece was reflected and had its dim double in the mirror over the dressing-table. There was not enough ventilation under the glass dome to keep the flame steady. A small bright disc wavered on the ceiling, and the light in the room was tremulous, flickering in the glass and

on the silver brushes and tray Sarah had bought for me. What she must have spent for these things which she had been collecting—who could say how long, or with what yearning love?

In the chest of drawers were little muslin bags of lavender, one for each drawer, and in the wardrobes more lavender bags of a different shape, hanging by ribbons from the hooks, under the clothes I had not had time to try on yet. Wonderful Sarah! And in her strenuous life before I came, she had found time to embroider fine underlinen and handkerchiefs for me. Nobody I ever knew could embroider more beautifully than Sarah Nicholls.

As I lay there in the bed, it was as if some inner self slipped out of the shell that was my body, and walked about, looking at everything: the china angels on the mantelpiece, the lithographs on the satin-striped white wall-paper, all the pictures chosen for the cheerfulness of their subjects: children playing with kittens; big dogs smiling at kennel doors; maidens with short-waisted dresses making up lovers' quarrels in gardens.

When this other me had catalogued the contents of my room, it went and peeped into the bath, which I had delighted Sarah by admiring: all white, and smelling very good of a rather strongly rose-scented soap. The bath-towels were thick and soft. There was a white rug on the imitation oak linoleum, a rug with a blue border and the word "Bath" in large blue letters. I revelled childishly in the thought of this little cube of a room with its white enamelled tub, and the wallpaper patterned like Dutch tiles.

Next, this self which could wander as it would while I lay in bed, flitted to Sarah's room. There she made up for her generous extravagance by severe

economy: no carpet; a stained floor, and a strip of matting in front of the narrow iron bedstead; not an ornament anywhere; nothing that was not strictly necessary, except a small book-shelf on the wall. The real me had glanced at those books when I first arrived in the afternoon, and remembered every one from childhood days. Sarah owned them all when I was a little girl, and had not lost one, or bought a new one since. There was "The Changed Cross," two volumes of religious verse bound in blue, the gilded edges of the leaves worn and faded now; "Stepping Heavenward," in brown; "The Gates Ajar," green; a book of Methodist hymns; a black-covered Bible; a novel by E. P. Roe: and I knew the faint, musty smell of the old pages. Nothing else in that room, nor in the house, except those books, to remind me of the past.

Those old friends Sarah could not part with, but probably she had not expected me to notice them. They had always seemed to me a part of herself. She travelled with them everywhere. I wondered if the books would ever do any more travelling, or if this little seaside villa would be their permanent resting-place—and mine.

Laurnum Lodge! Sweet and new and, above all, pathetic as it was, something began suddenly to shriek into my ears that I could not bear it for very long. I could like it now, and be thankful for its daintiness, passionately grateful to Sarah for her goodness, but by and by I should pine to get away. I should want to go out of England.

The spirit self that walked about the room slipped back into my body, and was hypnotised into peacefulness by the disc of light on the ceiling. Hours afterward, my eyes opened to a different light, the living

fire of dawn. I realised with joy that I had been asleep, and the gray dream had not come.

"Thank God!" I said involuntarily, almost in a whisper, yet Sarah heard, and appeared at the open door.

How good it was to see her there, though I ought to have wished her to be asleep!

By day, when Sarah was dressed, though she wore a plain black gown like a maid's or a housekeeper's, she had a mild air of distinction. She looked like a lady; a prim, delicate-minded, old-fashioned lady; not like a servant. Indeed, it seemed ridiculous, even horrifying to speak of her as a servant.

She did not look distinguished in her brown wrapper (she knew how I disliked gray things, and the reason) with her mouse-coloured, white-streaked hair in a meek walnut at the back of her head; but she was beautiful in my eyes. I think, through it all, I had never loved her so much as at that moment.

I lay still with my eyes half closed, gazing at Sarah, feeling the comfort of her presence and the joy of knowing that she would be there to-morrow and all the to-morrows. The light which came through the white blind and curtains was clear, but not strong yet, and as I lay in shadow Sarah could not be sure if I were awake. She was afraid to come nearer, thinking I might have spoken in my sleep.

There is something about the dawn which has a different quality from any other light. People who have secrets to hide can't like to be seen in the dawn. It is revealing. It seems to shine through the flesh to the soul. It was a new Sarah that I saw, though older than by day, older and frailer. She gazed at me with an intensity which gave a wildness to her light-blue eyes. They seemed to be telling me something

which I tried to understand but could not, and for an instant her expression turned her into a stranger. I wondered what that mysterious something could be, for nothing about her was really changed. Between my lashes I studied the long, thin face, with its high forehead, its hardly perceptible eyebrows, its deep-set, pale eyes sloping downward at the outer corners; its slightly prominent cheek-bones with the hollows beneath; the sweet, small, firmly-set lips, obstinately folded together, contradicting the weak, pointed chin. It was a lovable face, I thought, and very characteristic of Sarah, a mixture of strength and weakness. For my sake she had surmounted difficulties that would have discouraged many of the bravest men. Yet she was afraid of a mouse or a spider, turned sick at the sight of blood, even a drop on a cut finger; and she could neither read nor hear a description of torture.

"Sarah, dear," I whispered lazily. It was delicious to be lazy.

She started, with the quick shiver and involuntary, sidewise glance that had been a nervous affliction with her ever since the days of the great terror which shattered both our lives.

"My lamb! I thought you were asleep. You called out, so I jumped up and ran to the door, but your eyes were shut."

"I didn't call," I explained. "I only said 'Thank God!' because I'd slept all night, without the dream."

"Ah, that's good, mighty good! I told you it wouldn't come here. I reckon I'd better put a light to your fire. There's a chill in the air. You know this place is away up North. They say it's the best in England to make sick folks well, and that's why I took the house. But it's real cold sometimes."

"It doesn't seem cold to me," I said. "After what I——"

"Never mind, dearie, now don't you go talkin' about anything. It's only April, and it ain't like our old Aprils down in Alabama, is it?"

"They were so long ago, I've forgotten. Why, Sarah, I wasn't more than ten when mother and you and I came away. Think how many years——"

"No," she insisted, with a break in her thread of a voice, which had never lost its Southern drawl. "We just won't think of any years. We'll think about when you was a little girl, or we'll think of *now*. Or else we'll think of by-and-by."

She bustled about, found matches, and lit the gas fire. After all, I was glad of it. Not that I needed the warmth, for the air which came through the half-open window seemed to me mild as it was sweet; but I liked the purring of the gas, and the pretty light it made between the imitation logs.

"Another luxury!" I exclaimed. "Oh, Sarah, you can't imagine what all these things mean to me! I'm like some starved beggar-child, brought into a bright room where there's a Christmas tree, and told that I can have whatever I like for my own."

"I hope you ain't goin' to make me break down an' cry," Sarah mumbled, her back turned to me as she stooped over the fireplace. "I don't want to be as plumb silly as that."

"No, and I don't want you to be," I answered. "I've given you sorrow enough."

And as I spoke I was ashamed because I had told myself last night that I couldn't go on living always in Laburnum Lodge, at Margate. As if it mattered where I lived!

CHAPTER II

SARAH brought me my breakfast in bed: a silver cream-jug and dwarf coffee-pot, and china thin as an egg-shell.

"Oh, Sarah, what you must have spent on me!" I sighed. "But I know so well why you've done it—why you've made everything so dainty."

"Because I love you, that's why, Miss Nita," she caught me up with quick sharpness, almost funny for her monotonous voice, so meekly soft that it seldom rose much louder than a whisper. And I smiled to hear her call me "Miss Nita." "You needn't worry about what I've spent."

"I don't worry—except that I hope and pray you've spent some of my money and not all yours."

"I've spent my money, because I've got plenty of it," said Sarah, "and it's just as much yours as mine, as well you know, or ought to. But what *was* yours to begin with, I ain't touched a cent of. It's just bin pilin' up interest; and you ain't poor, Miss Nita. Don't you go imaginin' you are. You've got enough to buy yourself all the lovely things you ought to have: pretty dresses and hats—why, what makes you laugh?"

"The idea of pretty dresses and hats—for me! What would be the good of them? Sarah, dear, I shan't have the courage to go out of Laburnum

Lodge, except into the little garden at the back, and perhaps not even there, for people can see me from the windows of the two next door houses."

"Now, if you're goin' to feel like that, I shall just die!" Sarah quavered.

She came and stood at the foot of my bed, grasping the brass rail. Her thin hands—always thin, but much thinner than in old days—were like loose gloves drawn on over skeleton fingers. It was as if for my sake she had kept her face serene, and sweetly prim, through the battle of the years, but the strain had had to show somewhere, and so had made havoc of her delicate hands. The window curtains were drawn back, and the sunshine was merciless to her pale skin, that had little fine creases or cracks all over it, like very old china. Yet she did not look like a stranger, as she had for a moment in the clairvoyance of the dawn. She was sweet, and homely in the best sense of the word, in her inevitable black dress, her lace-trimmed cap over the neatly parted, sparse hair.

"I won't 'feel like that,' then!" I promised. "I will go into the garden. There's a nice tree there. I shall sit under it and read. I shall love that."

"You won't go out in the streets?" she asked, wistfully.

"Oh, I don't think I can! There are such crowds of people."

"Not people you know, dearie. They don't come to Margate, I reckon; and this is outside the town, anyway."

"I know, but—well, maybe I shall feel differently some day. You won't try to make me go, will you?"

"I shan't make you do one single thing you don't want to do, though I wish—. But I was lyin' awake some—oh, not much—in the night, thinkin'

maybe after all I'd make a real silly mistake bringin' you to a place like this. I didn't realise it till I saw you in the house. Then I says to myself, 'It ain't her *kind*. I don't know as she can be happy here.'"

"Oh, yes, I can," I hurried to reassure her. "Life, as most people think of it, is finished for me, but——"

"At your age, and with your looks? That's not right to say. God wouldn't like it."

"You good, old-fashioned Methodists know more about what He likes and dislikes than others do, of course," I laughed, "but He can't expect me——"

"He does expect! Why, you're goin' to begin all over again. There ain't any reason why you shouldn't. If you keep on sayin' there is, it will kill me, that's all."

"I won't again."

"If you think it and brood over it, that'll be worse."

"I'll try not to."

She went, as if on a sudden thought, quickly to the dressing-table, and picked up the silver-backed hand-glass which was one of her extravagances for me.

"I want you should look at yourself," she said. "You just do it, Miss Nita!" And gently yet obstinately she forced me to take the mirror.

I met my own eyes, and could not look away. A mirror is to my mind a wonderful and beautiful thing, even in itself, and I could not help thinking that my face was a wonderful and beautiful thing too. My hair curled round it, and made me look very young, as if nothing had ever happened in my life, except pleasant, ordinary things, such things as happen to protected girls. This struck me as terribly strange, even unnatural.

It seemed to me, as the eyes in the glass held my eyes, that I looked scarcely over nineteen. Yet I

remembered that, when I had been really nineteen, I was different. It was before my nineteenth birthday that the earth opened and swallowed me up. Staring at myself now, I recalled my face as it was then.

My eyes used to be so wide open that they had a surprised expression, and seemed immensely large. My face was round as a child's, and I used to hate my bright colour. I thought it uninteresting and admired white-faced women. Mine was white enough now! My hair, which used to be a yellow brown, had grown many shades darker, almost black.

Now the eyes staring sadly at me were long, rather than round, and did not look as if they could be surprised. Nor was my face round. It had thinned to an oval shape and my skin had paled to ivory. It struck me that if I should meet myself as a stranger, I should say, "She must be Spanish, or Italian." And perhaps that was not odd, for there is Spanish blood in my veins. My mother's mother was a Spanish woman, from Monterey.

"Sarah, I shall open *those trunks* to-day!" I said suddenly, giving her back the handglass.

"Mercy, Miss Nita, what brought them to your mind?"

"Remembering myself as I was at nineteen. I want to look through the things. I must have forgotten ever so many."

"Better keep forgettin'. I'd ha' left the trunks in the warehouse forever, and not brought 'em here if you hadn't told me that after a while the folks would open them to try and find out who they belonged to, and see whether I used a false name."

"And they could have found out."

"Oh, yes, they could. But don't you touch the things, Miss Nita—anyhow till you're stronger."

"I feel as if I must," I said. "I want to get it over. I can rest better afterward, perhaps."

She made no objections; and when I was dressed we went together to the box-room in a gabled attic above the two bedrooms of the little villa. It could be reached only by a steep, ladderlike staircase, but Sarah had had the trunks hidden away there in the hope that I should forget they were in the house. This she confessed when she realised that I must be allowed to have my way.

There were two trunks, both French. My mother had bought them for me at a trunk-maker's in Paris on my eighteenth birthday, though they were not regarded as birthday presents. So little had they been used since then that they looked almost new, standing in their corner of the bare new attic of Laburnum Lodge.

Keys in hand, Sarah tried to make me change my mind at the last moment.

"Are you *plumb* sure you can't wait just a few weeks?"

"'Plumb' sure," I echoed, smiling at the word, which in a breath wafted me back to the South, and my childhood. "Do you remember, Sarah, how when I first went to school to Miss Peck, I came home and told you that you mustn't say 'plumb' any more, because it was a common expression unless you meant fruit? Oh, how well I remember! You blushed, you poor dear, and I was so sorry I'd hurt your feelings, that I said the word myself whenever I could afterward, to make up to you."

Sarah, delighted to put off the evil moment of opening the trunks, straightened up on her knees,

as she knelt on a piece of matting, and smiled back at me.

"Dear me, no, Miss Nita, I reckon my feelings couldn't ha' bin hurt very bad, for I ain't thought of it from that day to this. But it's just like you to remember, with your tender heart that would grieve if you harmed a fly!"

As she spoke, our eyes met for an instant. There was fright in hers, and a dark colour streamed over her face. Then she looked hastily away, and began fitting a key into the lock of the larger trunk.

"Well," she said confusedly, "I suppose if it's got to be done, we might as well get at it."

"Hateful trunks!" I mumbled. "Doesn't it seem strange to see them look as new as they did when you unpacked them for me in England? I liked the colour of them then, but now——"

It was not worth while to finish the sentence. Sarah knew what I meant. Both trunks, exactly alike except in size, were grey with a small stamped pattern of *fleurs-de-lys*.

Sarah's hands were trembling. She had some difficulty in lifting the lid, but when I would have helped, she shook her head with an excited "No. You shan't touch it!" Forcing the lid up with a wild energy that was almost fury, some tiny, unseen tack or splinter grazed her hand, bringing blood. She turned yellow-pale, and a dew sprang out on her forehead, which glistened faintly in the light from a window high in the gable.

"Poor Sarah!" I exclaimed. "I'm so sorry. Does it hurt much?"

"No, dearie, no," she said in a quivering voice. "It ain't a bit bad. Only you know what a silly thing I always was about a drop o' blood. I must ha'

bin marked that way, I reckon, by my mother before me. I just can't help it." She wrapped a clean handkerchief round the wounded hand, deftly making a kind of thumbless mitten. "Now I can go on all right."

I pushed her gently back (for she was on her feet now) and opened the top tray myself. Photographs were there, framed and unframed, piled together anyhow, as Sarah had packed them in a hurry. On top was a picture of me as a slim little thing of five, large-eyed, with immense masses of curly hair, standing by a chair in which sat my mother, her hands full of roses.

"Oh, Sarah!" I cried. "That's the dress with the pocket you sewed up because I put snails in it!"

She drew near, and I showed her the photograph. My heart felt suddenly lighter, as if a heavy load had been lifted from my breast; and I knew that Sarah was cheered.

"Why, yes, so it is. Poor lamb."

"Poor, indeed! If she had known——"

"Now, don't, Miss Nita! What a pretty picture it is of your mama."

"Lovely," I agreed. "She couldn't have been more than twenty-five, could she—and she looks eighteen. But she hadn't begun yet to realise what a great beauty she was."

"I reckon she knew she was mighty handsome. She couldn't ha' helped it, admired as she was by all the gentlemen after your papa died. You can see by her black dress, she wasn't out o' mourning for him when the photograph was took. But 'twasn't till the winter she went up to New York that she got to know how much better-lookin' she was than all the noted ladies."

"When I was eight. We had a nice winter down at home, you and I, Sarah. She didn't care enough for me to make me miss her much. But she brought back that lovely doll—you remember? How I adored it! Two years later, when we were going to live abroad, she said I would love Paris because there were lots of dolls there, and I could have as many as I wanted. But I never did have another."

"You took Antoinette to the convent when your mama sent you to school. If I'm not mistaken, she's in that very trunk you're lookin' in now, Miss Nita, 'way down at the bottom, wrapped in something blue, I ain't sure what, because I was in no state of mind to——"

She broke off short. Already we had both left many sentences unfinished. I foresaw that it would often happen. Only the childhood days were safe ground. Talking of them was like being on a flowery island in the midst of a stormy sea, so small an island that unless we were careful we missed our footing. We were on the island of safety up to the time of my coming out of the convent school. After that, the rocks were slippery.

I glanced through the photographs, dreading something that I was spared. Then Sarah took out the tray, and at the top of the one underneath lay the thing which first made me hate all that is gray in colour. Together we saw it, and I heard Sarah draw in her breath sharply.

"Oh, Miss Nita!" she said in her frightened whisper, "if only you'd ha' let me do this alone!"

"I know. You would have hidden the gray dressing-gown. But I didn't wish you to hide anything.

It seemed to me that if I could bear this, there's nothing left that I can't bear. I wanted to test my strength. Don't you think I'm doing well?"

With an effort, I put out my hand and took the dressing-gown from the trunk, but I could not help shuddering when the satin folds and soft edging of chinchilla brushed my bare arm.

"You know," I said, "it's always in this I see myself in the dream."

With a cry, Sarah snatched the dressing-gown from me—she, who was always so gentle, almost subservient.

"For God's sake, let me burn it!" she panted.

"Yes. That is one reason I wanted to open the trunk. I wanted first to make sure where *this* was, and then to know it had ceased to exist. Oh, I shall be glad to have it burnt! But not yet. Don't leave me alone here. There may be other things——"

As I spoke, I saw the volume of Browning I had been reading *that night*. . . in the gray dressing-gown . . . to keep myself awake. "The Ring and the Book" and "Pippa Passes."

Sarah's eyes fell on it, following mine. She remembered.

"Shall I burn this too?" she asked, and would have wrapped the book in the folds of satin. But I covered it with a protecting hand.

"It would be sacrilege to burn those glorious thoughts," I said. "It's dreadful to burn any book. But Browning——! No!"

With the dress and the book of the dream, the worst was over. There was nothing else in either of the trunks which stabbed my heart, unless perhaps

the diary which used to be my intimate companion. But this faded, blue-covered volume (I wonder if all girls choose blue for their diaries?) brought me only from the age of ten to fourteen. It began when we were starting for Europe, mother, Sarah, and I; and ended with my unrequited love for Willy Mackinnon in the summer holidays which I spent with Sarah at Versailles.

Once I had begun, I could not put the book down. To read what I had thought and felt in those half-forgotten days was like being pricked by the thorns of a sweet-scented rose.

I stood turning over the pages, and Sarah did not speak or interrupt me by a movement. Almost I forgot her and the attic, as I read; yet I was queerly conscious that there was in both our minds an undertone of the same thought: a remembrance of the missing volume which followed this: the book of myself from fourteen to nineteen, that had been taken away and never given back.

If anyone had offered, before I opened the diary, to blot out from my life all that was terrible, provided I would tell what was written on the first or any other page of the book, I could not have told. But opening it was like opening the door of a shut-up house, and walking from one long ago familiar room to another, where not one piece of furniture, not one ornament was really forgotten. The Christmas party at the hotel in Paris, soon after we arrived and began to know people. Charlie Sachett, who taught me to waltz and tried to kiss my ear.

There was my first day at the convent, described from beginning to end, and the Mother-Superior and the sisters and what they had said: names of girls

buried till now under the dust of later memories; my first meeting with Diane Tenier and the idea about mother which she put into my head. "On dit que votre maman est tellement belle et jeune qu'elle n'aime pas d'avoir un enfant grand comme vous près d'elle. C'est pour ça que vous êtes chez nous à présent. Peut-être vous resterez toujours?" All this painfully written down in my best newly learned French, followed with, "I don't believe a word she says. Diane is a mean thing. I don't like French girls nearly so well as American or English ones."

I didn't believe Diane. But I never got her words out of my head. Sometimes I used to try to push them out, when they would suggest themselves as explanations of things that happened.

On the last page of the diary, there they were, still lurking in my memory:

"Mama says she thinks I had better spend the rest of my holidays at the convent because it's safer, till I come out for good. But I don't care. I shall never forget Willy Mackinnon. If he isn't married when I grow up I shall make him fall in love with me. And I've vowed never to love anyone but Willy even if I have to be an old maid, though Diane thinks mama will marry me off quickly, as French mothers do their girls. At the end of ten years I'll look back to this page and write down, in the space I'll leave at the bottom, what has happened. But I know I shall have kept my vow."

Poor little girl! I would not spoil her book by writing another word in it. It does not seem as if she and I were one. I think of her as a dead friend for whom I have a pitying tenderness. But if she had lived and grown up to be happy she would not

have wanted to keep her vow. Willy Mackinnon was a silly, effeminate boy, and worth none of the trouble he helped to make later. I should like that little girl to have loved a *man* if she had lived to grow up.

CHAPTER III

I KEPT my promise to Sarah and went out, wearing a thick blue veil which she bought for me; but it was at the time of the Easter bank holiday, and the sea front and the streets depressed me with a black depression. The air, I knew, was supposed to be a tonic, and Sarah had chosen Margate for my sake. Perhaps, too, she had secretly thought 'hat its "liveliness" would do me good. But the people I saw, who stared at my veil as if in the hope it might cover some curious deformity, irritated and made me sad, they were so ugly or so coarse; and the knife-keen wind cut through my body. If I had been strong and happy, it might have affected me like boisterous shouts of joy; but the gray sky and rough gray sea, silvered sometimes with bursts of unsympathetic sunshine, had no messages from Nature for me. I longed for southern blues and greens, and rich orange-gold; but I said nothing of this to Sarah. I felt that it would be better to die in the little home her love had made, rather than let her know that her devotion was in vain. And there were reasons why it would be well to die; few why it would be good to live.

I sat wrapped in shawls and rugs in the back yard which we both called "the garden," but I had no heart to work in it. I knew that I could not care for any flowers which might consent to grow in such

a place, so why plant them if they were not to be loved?

I had thought, when I was ill, how splendid it would be to walk, or even to be out of doors, but now I liked better to stay in the house where I felt safe from eyes, and where I was warmed by Sarah's watchful affection.

Soot from the chimneys of the two neighbouring villas fell on me in the garden, and gave me an excuse to run back to the sitting-room. I read a great many romances which Sarah brought me from the circulating library, and at first I enjoyed them, even those which were not well written; by and by, however, they lost their novelty; even the best could not take my mind off myself.

We had no servant; but Sarah, who had a natural, Southern gift for cooking, thought of a new dish every day, but it was an effort to express enough delight to reward her. And I did so want to reward her as she deserved!

One morning, when she had been out marketing, she came in later with a bunch of red roses on top of the bundles in her string bag.

"For you, Miss Nita," she said, breathlessly, as she always spoke after walking fast. "Don't they smell like the South?"

I buried my face in the cup of the roses.

"They *are* the South," I answered. "They don't belong here."

"Neither do we, I reckon," said Sarah. "*You* don't, and no more do I; and I tell you what, lovey, we ain't goin' to waste our lives stayin' in a place like this when there's others about ten thousand times nicer, callin' and callin'."

I stared at her, over the roses.

A faint colour was coming and going on her thin face. I had never seen her like that except when she was highly excited. She looked as she did the day when mother offered to get a French maid and give her—Sarah—back to me.

For a minute she stood nervously swinging the string bag, full of bundles. Then, suddenly, she began taking them out, in a hurry: parcels of tomatoes, of hot-house grapes, and Bengier's food for me. Underneath all, there was something shaped like a book, in brown paper.

"There!" she exclaimed. "Open that. Maybe it's 'most as good as the roses. I reckon it'll show you the way to 'em anyhow."

"Murray's 'Spain,'" I said, when I had freed the red book from its wrapping. "What made you think of getting that?"

"Because you used to say you'd rather see Spain than any other place, on account o' your grandma. Not that she was ever there herself, but her folks all come from Spain. I reckon you haven't got over wantin' to go, have you?"

"I've not thought about it for a long time——"

"Ah, that was only because it didn't seem as if you could get there," she caught the words out of my mouth. "But now there ain't a single reason why you can't. At the bookstore this morning I asked for a book about Spain, and the man give me that. He was a real nice man, and took an interest when I said I thought o' goin'. He said he guessed spring was the best time."

"But we can't go," I said.

"Yes, we can. Why not, I'd like to know? And we've got to go somewheres mighty soon, because—Miss Nita, I've rented this house."

"Sarah!"

"Yes, I have. It's the same as done. I've bin tryin' to get it off our hands since a week after you come. I see it wouldn't *do*. I didn't say a word, for fear of buildin' up your hopes and lettin' 'em down, for I sort o' knew you'd make a fuss about leavin', if the villa was empty. You'd ha' thought 'twould be a burden on me. Not that it *would*. But I wanted you to have the pleasure without any worry. And now it's all *right*, Miss Nita. I had a letter from the house agent this morning. Don't you remember, you thought it sounded like a postman's knock, and you looked 'most frightened? I had to fib and say 'twas a circular. So 'twas, in a way. It was to tell me a gentleman will take the villa for himself and his invalid wife for a year and maybe more if he finds it as nice inside as out, and as good as the description the agent give him. Well, that's the same as if it was rented, because it's a *lot* nicer inside than anybody'd think, to pass by, ain't it?"

"Indeed it is," I said. "But, O Sarah, the little house you've spent so much on. I can't——"

"Yes, you can, honey. I always had it in my mind that if it wouldn't *do*, I'd rent it to some one, and we'd clear out. That's one reason I was partic'lar to have things real well done, so as it would be a good investment. Now I'm mighty glad I did. If you'll take a walk this afternoon between three and four, it will be best, because the gentleman's comin' to go over the house. His wife has to live in Margate for the air, and they're anxious to get out of their hotel and settled. I shan't be surprised if you and me can start next week."

It almost frightened me to find that I was still capable of joy and excitement. I had told myself

that if I lived I should be like a shadow: wherever I might go, the sunshine would fly before me. Yet here I was with the blood racing through my veins because we were turning our backs on Margate, looking towards Spain.

I stayed out until five, and before I had time to touch the electric bell, Sarah appeared, beaming.

"I thought you'd never come!" she exclaimed. "Seemed like I couldn't wait to tell you. He's a retired army officer, with money, I reckon, for he didn't do any bargaining. His name's Major Turner, and he's willin' to pay eighty pounds a year. That's four hundred dollars, ain't it? Come and drink your Benger, and we'll make plans about startin'."

"Sarah, you are an angel!" I said, putting my arms around her as we stood in the tiny passage. "A glorious, unselfish angel!"

I felt her quiver sensitively, and the joy died out of her face. Suddenly it looked tired and old.

"You don't know, Miss Nita, how it hurts to hear you keep on callin' me such names as that. You won't do it any more, will you, child?" she pleaded, almost pushing me away.

And for once she forgot her humility, to pass before me into the chintzy sitting-room which had caught Major Turner's fancy. I felt ungrateful because I was glad that he, and not I, was to see it every day for the next year.

By the time I had taken off my veil and gloves, and Sarah had the cup of Benger on a tray, she was her mild, cheerful self again, and we began to talk of Spain.

"But supposing you're not happy there?" I said. "You don't know a word of Spanish. It will be

different from any place where you have ever lived, and so far away——”

“Wasn’t I happy in France, while I had you?” she broke in. “Why, any place is my home if you’re there. You ought to know that by this time. I ain’t had any other sort of home for so many years now, I forget what it feels like; and even if I went ’way back down to Alabama, it wouldn’t be like home now, because my folks are all dead and gone long ago, and the friends I had have forgotten me—at least”—and the startled look came into her eyes—“I hope they have, for I don’t want anyone on this earth but you. We’re both of us alone in the world, me ever since I was young, and you since your mama died. It’s a pity if we can’t make ourselves feel at home anywheres. As for knowin’ no Spanish, I never knew more’n about twelve words o’ French all the time I was livin’ in France. I reckon I can pick up as much as that of another language, even at my age.”

“Of course you can,” I hurried to assure her. “I spoke only because I can’t bear to have you sacrificing yourself——”

“There you go again, Miss Nita!”

I laughed at her reproachful face. “You won’t let yourself be appreciated if you can help it. Oh, don’t look like that! I shan’t say any more. Let’s study Murray’s ‘Spain.’”

Not that there was need of study. There was but one place in Spain where I wanted, and had always wanted, to live. That was Granada, which I had yearned to see ever since a Monterey cousin sent me Washington Irving’s “Alhambra,” on my ninth birthday. It was the first “grown-up” book I ever read, and I had difficulty with the Spanish and

Moorish names. Perhaps those difficulties made the book more precious, like a hidden jewel I had to search for in a cave as mysterious as the Alhambra itself. There was also another reason, less romantic, but more important, why I fixed upon Granada the instant the prospect of Spain was opened for me. Granada in June and July would be almost empty of tourists. The Spanish people I should not mind. It seemed that I might even feel at home with them; and it would be a great interest, learning their language. I could not imagine myself staying at a hotel in a town where I might stumble against old acquaintances. The idea was unbearable; but Granada in the summer would be empty, and already it was past the middle of May. I had been at Laburnum Lodge for six weeks, which seemed six months. I began to make plans.

"Sarah, were you a good sailor when we came from America?" I asked.

"Yes, indeed, I was mighty good," she said, "though there was a storm that lasted three days."

"Then we'll travel by sea!" I exclaimed. "We can go to Gibraltar in a ship on its way to India or Australia; and Murray says it's only half an hour or so to cross to Algeciras. Don't you think that will be best?"

"I'm right sure it will," Sarah agreed.

Neither of us spoke out what was in our thoughts, or swimming just underneath their surface: that we did not wish to go to Paris. It was a place of memories.

The next day we began to get ready, though we had a whole week before the Turners would move in. I made Sarah give away the two gray trunks that were in the attic, and everything in them which could

not be identified, except the gray dressing-gown and a few photographs which she had burned. The Browning and my diary, and my dead mother's picture, I kept, though she had never cared for me really, and hated me at the last.

Now that I was to leave Laburnum Lodge I began to love it, though I knew that I should fall back into the old bored dislike if anything happened to change our plans and force us to stay.

In feeling this, I looked at my character as if it were that of another person whom I was studying. Was it a sign that I was changeable, that nothing could please me for long? That no sooner had one thing been given me than I tired of it, and longed for something else. If so, there was no chance of contentment in the future stretching ahead like a long, straight road, dimly seen in twilight. Would it be the same thing over again when we got to Granada? I kept asking myself, in fear of what the answer might have to be. If I should find that the fault was in myself, not in Laburnum Lodge, then there was no hope left, nothing in me worth Sarah Nicholls' devotion, nothing worth self-respect.

There was not much packing to do, for neither of us had many clothes. Sarah had provided me with a few things, hoping that as I grew stronger I might take an interest in choosing for myself; but the interest had not come yet.

In London we stayed for several days in quiet lodgings, which we selected from a list of advertisements in a newspaper; and, wearing the thick veil I wore in Margate, I bought our tickets for the ship, and did a little shopping. I felt like a ghost sent back to visit old haunts, yet the thought of Granada in the distance kept me from being depressed.

I had no idea of buying pretty things for myself, but the day before the *Mooltan* was to sail, Sarah went out alone, and was gone all the morning. When she came in, white and weary, about three o'clock, I asked anxiously what had delayed her so long.

"I kep' thinkin' of one thing and another to do," she answered mysteriously, with the little dry cough she always had when she was tired, and her heart was fluttering. "I didn't realise you was goin' to be worried, I was *that interested!*"

"Oh, well, then I'm glad you stayed out," I said. "But you might tell me what it was that interested you so much."

"You'll see by an' by," she replied, nodding her head. "I've been buyin' two or three little odds an' ends. They'll be stringin' along all the afternoon, I reckon. But don't you ask me any questions, for I've plumb made up my mind not to answer."

"Just one; did you have any lunch?"

"Mercy, no, child, I didn't get a single minute to spare. I'll have a cup o' tea and some toast now. I've kind o' bin lookin' forward to it."

"I should think so, when you had no breakfast but toast and tea. And now you'll lunch on tea and toast. *Bad Sarah!*"

"I know I'm bad," she answered meekly, whereupon I was disarmed. *Marvellous Sarah!*

As she said, the things did "keep stringing along" all the afternoon, and into the evening.

Sarah had bought me silk stockings, and suède gloves of pale tints, which she considered suitable to Spain. She had bought delicate blouses, silk petticoats, and a white serge coat and skirt. There were

dainty shoes and slippers, matched in size from a boot of mine taken by stealth, and even a pair of rose-and-white, brocaded satin corsets.

"Why, Sarah," I reproached her, "you must have spent more than twenty pounds!" And that was before the hats and veils and perfumes and manicure things began to arrive.

"Never you mind how much I spent!" she chuckled with unwonted gaiety. "I was bound you should *have* the things, and I knew you wouldn't get 'em for yourself, because I begged you to a hundred times in Margate, and you never would. This is next best to your choosin', and if anything ain't right it can be changed. But I reckon there won't be much wrong. I've took a lot o' pains; and I ain't enjoyed a day so much since I fetched you out o' the convent when you was seventeen. Now I want you should try every single thing on, and see how you look in 'em all. That's what I've bin countin' on the live-long day."

"But, Sarah—*me* in those satin corsets! *Me* in a Leghorn hat wreathed with roses! It's—it's like dressing up a—corpse!"

The minute the words were off my tongue I regretted them, fearing to see her flinch; but she protested in undiminished excitement:

"You put the things on, Miss Nita, and see whether you feel like a dead corpse or not. You're no *woman* if you do."

I would not have believed that the pretty frivolities could make a complete change in my feelings. But instinct must have told Sarah what the effect was likely to be. A rush of youth came over me. It was the Leghorn hat with roses, and the collarless chiffon blouse, and the white cloth skirt, showing bronze

shoes and brown silk stockings, which worked the magic.

I threw my arms around Sarah and hugged her.

"I owe everything to you!" I cried out. "I've owed you everything for a thousand black years, and now you're giving me back my youth! I've no right to it—but——"

"You've got a right to everything that's good and beautiful," she said. "You've got the right to live!"

CHAPTER IV

FOR one thing I thanked Margate. It was the sight of the ever-incoming waves, and the thought of the unseen, outgoing ships, bound for strange far-off ports, east and west and south, that put into my head the wish to go by sea to Spain.

All day Sarah and I sat on deck, in steamer chairs. I wore my thick veil, and sat with eyes half shut, seldom speaking to Sarah or glancing at the book in my lap. New voices, such as I had never heard before, spoke to me in the wind, and in the clear whisper of waters against the beating side of the ship. The brown-skinned Lascars, with their little caps and bright sashes, and bare feet padding on the deck, gave an air of strangeness to the ship, romantic as the smell of sandalwood.

To be going out of England to a country dreamt of, yet never seen—a country to which my blood gave me claim—was beautiful as an answered prayer. This was not because I had learned to hate England—rather the contrary; but because I told myself that I had no longer any right in that land. It was, to my mind, as if I were an adopted child in a country-house full of happy children who belonged there. I, an alien, because of things that had happened was not loved by the children of the house. They did

not wish me to play with them, but murmured and raised their eyebrows when I came near.

At first, I had not the courage to go to the dining-saloon for meals. Sarah brought me something to eat on deck, but when she reported that at her table there were only a deaf man with a near-sighted wife, and their two daughters, I decided to run the risk. It would make things easier afterward, if I began to go among people, Sarah argued; and it was conspicuous to sit always on deck, taking my meals there.

On the third day I went to luncheon, unpinning my veil as I sat down. For a minute I could not look up, though I tried. It seemed as if there were a hand on my eyelids. My fingers trembled so that I could hardly unfold my napkin, and I felt as if all the eyes in the dining-saloon had become one great, terrible eye. But when I did compel myself to look up (more for Sarah's sake than my own, because I heard that little nervous, fluttering cough of hers) nobody was taking the slightest notice of me. We had chosen the moment after the sounding of the bugle to come below, so that we might be among the first. No one had arrived at our table. People in other parts of the saloon were slipping into their revolving chairs, talking and laughing, for everybody knew everybody else by this time.

As the dark-faced Indian steward gave me a menu, and Sarah had not yet dared to speak, our table companions came, sliding into their chairs on the side opposite us. For a second or two my heart was in my throat, it was so new and terrible to be thus close and at the mercy of strangers. But the deaf husband, a stout, comfortable man of fifty-five, was helping to seat his wife. They bowed to Sarah, including me in

the gesture. The man's look rested on me benevolently for an instant. Then he absorbed himself in advising his wife what to have for luncheon, and announcing to the whole family his own selection. The two bouncing girls looked at me with vague interest in a new arrival whom, perhaps, they flattered by thinking pretty. Maybe they were sorry for me because I was large-eyed and pale, not rosy and sunburned like themselves.

By and by the gentle little mother spoke. She hoped that I had not suffered from the sea? No? That was good. The voyage so far had been delightful. Her husband had brought her by sea for the benefit of her health. We talked across the table: the girls asked if I played or sang: They were getting up a concert. Never mind if I couldn't do anything. I could listen. . . . And so the ordeal was over. After that I took all my meals at the table; and though Sarah and I did not refer to it, because we had a way of ignoring things, I knew that she was thankful. This was what she had prayed for, no doubt; and her prayer was answered. I was sure that she did pray for me, even for the smallest trifles concerning my welfare; for Sarah, though meekly unobtrusive about her inner life, was fervently religious.

Only one thing I said, on the voyage, that bore on the subject of my new courage. "I wonder if there can be a chance for me," I asked, "to break the cocoon and come out alive from the chrysalis? Or isn't there a chrysalis? Am I just a mummy tightly folded up in my rusty wrappings?"

"No, you ain't any mummy," Sarah soothed me, though I suspect that if asked to describe a mummy, or even a chrysalis she would have been at a loss. "You're something like the princess in a fairy tale

I used to read you out of your blue book—do you remember? The wicked fairy had made her go to sleep in a dark, deep wood, and she was like one dead till the black magic was taken off by the prince——”

“The prince!” I laughed so harshly that poor Sarah was startled. “If I depend on a prince to take away the curse I shall lie for ever in my enchanted sleep. No prince would come near me. And I should send him away if he did.”

“I reckon you couldn’t do that, if you was fast asleep,” said Sarah, slyly, in her soft Southern drawl. “And there ain’t any *reason* why you should send a prince away, even if you was wide awake. You’ve got as good a right——”

“Don’t!” I cut her short. “Don’t let’s even talk about such a thing. I hate it!”

Sarah was silenced, and looked so crushed that I was repentant.

“Forgive me, dear, kind friend,” I said, taking her hand and pressing it against my cheek, as I lay in my berth and she bent over me, “tucking me in.” “I know how you mean to cheer me, as if I were like other women. But I don’t need a prince to wake me up, if only I can prove myself to be a butterfly in a chrysalis. I shall find out how to feel my wings when the time comes. The thing I ask is, am I one of those who have the *faculty* of beginning life over again, after such a knock-down blow? Some people have that faculty. Others haven’t. It’s a kind of gift, I suppose. Is it too good to be true that I should have it? I’ve only just begun to wonder. A little while ago I should have thought it would be impossible for me to *live* again. But now—sometimes, for a minute or two at a time—I hope—— O Sarah,

if I develop the faculty, it will be all through you!"

"My precious one!" she crooned. "You make me want to fall right down on my knees and give up the ghost!"

Half laughing at her, half crying for us both, I would have kissed her hand if she hadn't snatched it away.

After five days, a crouching lion-form of rock rose dark against a sky of pale violet. And as we landed from the tender, among a crowd of swarthy Spaniards, white-turbaned Moors, and khaki-clad British soldiers, a voice seemed to whisper an answer to my question. It said, "Yes, you *can* learn, if you will to begin again."

"This is what we wanted, ain't it?" asked Sarah, as we rattled in a queer brown vehicle up the hilly street to a hotel. "Something 'most as different from what *we* ever knew as if we'd flown to some other world?"

She meant it was what *I* had wanted, but it was not worth while to argue.

By this time we had come to the first of June and there were very few people in our hotel. It was a noisy hotel, and its cheap modern copies of old Moorish tiles were crude and harsh in colour; but it was so novel to us and everything was so strange, that we were inclined to admire. We had meant to stop only one night, but the rock fortress in the sea fascinated us both, and we stayed on. "We can do just as we like," said Sarah. "There ain't one thing to hurry us."

That was true. No one cared what Mrs. A. Lippincott and Miss S. Nelson did, where they went, how soon they arrived anywhere, or even whether they

died, provided they did not fall dead in a hotel or any other public place inconvenient to their (more or less) fellow human beings.

It was Sarah who gave me the name of Mrs. Lippincott. When I surprised everyone concerned by getting well instead of dying, it seemed necessary to have a new label, since the old one was worse than useless. I proposed to be Mrs. Smith, because anyone can be Mrs. Smith, and about half the inhabitants of many places are. But Sarah's favourite name, for some reason, was Lippincott. She thought it sounded distinguished, without being conspicuous. And when I realised that she would take more pride in Mrs. Lippincott than in Mrs. Smith, I was glad to please her. "Nelson" she chose for herself because it conveniently had the same initial as Nicholls, and the name of Sarah Nicholls might have associations for observing persons with good memories. It was better to make a clean sweep of both our names, as we were trying to do with all that was old.

Mrs. Lippincott and Miss Nelson, her middle-aged companion, spent most of their time at Gibraltar in the public gardens, or in the long, hilly street of Oriental-looking shops. I had a different veil now, one of creamy Spanish lace with a thick border, and a pattern which hid my face as if behind a vine-covered trellis. I wore it on a wide-brimmed, white straw hat, which went very well with one of the muslin dresses Sarah had bought on her famous field-day in London. It was summer weather here, like July in England, according to some old memories I had; and the brilliant sunshine was what I had longed for.

I entered the shops almost boldly, shops where they sold Indian silver and carved ivory; spicy-smelling

shops, where Turkish rugs were displayed, and embroidered draperies; Spanish shops for lace and fans and tiny models of black fighting bulls speared by miniature toreros; shops where spangled scarves glittered, and whiffs of attar of rose came through the open doors; shops of Moorish pottery and antique Spanish furniture and brocades. We bought odds and ends we did not want or know what to do with, but they were all so unlike anything I had seen that they seemed to be part of the new life. Here in Gibraltar it was as if I could peep through the crevice of a door ajar into that new life. I looked beyond into a strange brightness which was glory after the dim gray light of the dream.

Already the horror of being stared at was passing. I began to be less self-conscious, and to enjoy gazing at people from behind my veil: at the officers and soldiers, at the brown-faced Gibraltarians whom they called "rock scorpions," and at the Moorish poultry merchants from wild parts of Morocco, who were like Sultans out of the "Arabian Nights."

At last, when we had been at Gibraltar five days, we took an early boat across the bay of A'geciras. It would be the first time we had set foot in Spain, though we might have gone over any day and returned in a few hours. I wanted not to go until we left Gibraltar for good and all.

Suddenly, as the wind dashed sea-fragrance into my face I felt as if the deepest down layer of ice that bound my heart was melting. The sound of the breeze rushing past my ears as the boat moved was like a harp accompanying a song of many voices so far off that I could not catch tune or words; but the music was meant for me. The lively air and the

sparkling sea danced to it together, and the small blue and silver waves were streaked with pink and golden lights of morning. Out of the rainbow-water the tawny African mountains rose in strange, romantic shapes. Only the shadows looked green. The hills themselves were of that orange gold I had pined to see, as someone who is starved with cold longs to see fire. Everything was bright and full of colour and motion, except the warships in Gibraltar harbour, powerful monsters which made the puffing tugs and skittish launches, the glittering motor vessels and the sail-boats with spread wings, look like ducks and gulls and Mother Carey's chickens compared to sleeping whales. To me it was all so beautiful that I wondered how the people on our boat could laugh and chat about commonplace things in their own small lives.

We did not stay at Algeciras, for the hotel in the beautiful garden was too full and fashionable for us, even in June. Straight to the Ronda and Granada train we went from the boat-landing close by; and then came hours of travelling through a strange, lost Paradise, gorge after gorge where only the train and men on foot or on horseback can go.

There were groves of cork-trees, with bare, flesh-like trunks, and the dark covering of cork left here and there like rags on a half stripped beggar. From the train we could look far down to a river, with white stones dropped into water green as jade. Immense bunches of rose-coloured, wild oleanders crowded close to the edge, or leaned over from brown cliffs. A man in our carriage, English, but evidently living in Spain, told a friend that the wild oleander was supposed to breed fever, or bring ill luck, and no

Spaniards would go near it, or have it in their houses. Then it occurred to me that I was like the oleander, struggling to live my life in sad, lonely places; that people looked at me with a kind of fearful admiration, and went away quickly, as if I could do them harm, or bring misfortune to their homes. I felt sorry for the oleander, and thought that if ever I had a chance, I would risk gathering some of the flowering branches.

My heart warmed to the country, wild as it was and desolate among the mountains. And I should have liked to live, with Sarah to love and be kind to me, in one of the little houses of the road-menders, whitewashed cottages with posts or trunks of cut trees set up in front, with beams across, curtained with vines.

From the small stations where we stopped, Spanish eyes gazed up at the train windows, and boys offered strawberries and cherries, or girls uncovered trays of iced cakes. Old women poured water from dewy, white clay jugs into tumblers, for the passengers, and men with grave faces under broad sombreros loaded jingling, tasselled mules with bags of meal or oil jars.

The Englishman who lived in Spain spoke to his friend of the gorge of Ronda, and how in June there would probably be no one but Spaniards in the hotel. This, and the stories he told in a loud voice (perhaps for our benefit) of the old Moorish palaces and mills, made me want to stop at Ronda; so we took our hand luggage and got out at the station. The larger things we let go on to Granada; and that night we stayed at the Reina Victoria with its gardens on the verge of an incredible gulf. It was like seeing into another world to stand and stare over the edge. I felt as if I were looking down into the depths of my

own past, after I had climbed up into air and daylight, and had not yet found a firm footing. Perhaps I never would find one, I said to myself; but I had begun to hope a little. Though I knew well that the hill-tops belonged to the other people, the happy people, I thought that if I didn't push myself forward, if I asked and expected nothing of them, perhaps they might not mind my having just a small place in the sun. The wind pouring up from the depths of the gulf was a voice promising peace. There at the bottom, nearly a thousand feet down, everything concerning man appeared curiously insignificant. Could it be that the things I had suffered would ever seem so far away, if I could mount to greater heights? I wondered, as I leaned on the wall of the terrace looking over the precipice.

The season crowds had gone from the hotel, and it was restful in the summer heat. Dark blue linen was fastened over the panes of the huge windows, and the awnings were down, between the brick pillars of the veranda, from morning till sunset; but Sarah and I braved the flaming afternoon, and walked into the town over the marvellous bridge, and to the Alameda. A boy fair as an Anglo-Saxon thrust upon us his services as guide, and got permission to go through the old palace of the Moorish king, down the steps made by Christian slaves in secret passages, to the bottom of the gorge. There, where we came out, the wild oleander was growing above the green torrent which rushed by and filled the ravine with its hoarse voice. I gathered some of the branches, as I had vowed in the train I would do, though Sarah begged me not to touch them.

"Maybe it's true what that man said," she pleaded. "You've had enough bad luck. I'd sooner do all I

could to keep it off, than run the risk of attractin' more."

But I only laughed.

"You, a pious Methodist, as superstitious as the Spanish peasants!" I teased her. "The oleander is sad, like me, because it is a pariah. I want to show it that somebody isn't afraid."

The blue-eyed boy who had guided us could understand English and speak it a little. He had learned the language for two reasons. One, because many tourists came to see the gorge, and he could do good business with them; the other, because like many in Ronda he had an ancestor who was an Englishman, one of Wellington's soldiers, married to a Moorish woman. He listened to all we said, and protested against my gathering the oleander.

"It bring a curse to any peoples who pulls it out of where it grow," he said, "if they not have curse on them before."

"And if they have?" I asked.

"If they have curse already, oleanders can take it off," he answered. "I hear gypsy by the Alhambra tell that to some ones once. I was to Granada with English family, like guide, and I hear that in the gypsy cave. The gypsy peoples know all the secret things of the plants and the stars. That one says, if somebody been cursed, oleanders found by a happy one can bring a great, strange joy, but if not cursed, then take care!"

I bent down from the rocky platform where we stood and gathered another branch.

After olive-clad slopes and floods of poppies, the first sight of Granada was a blow. My heart ached as we drove in the hotel omnibus from the railway

station towards the hill of the Alhambra. The street was new and ugly and straggling; the young trees—just at the awkward age—were gray with dust from the uneven white road. The one pleasant sound was a jingling of mule bells. Faces that passed looked Saracenic and sullen. The people were of a different type from the deer-eyed Andalusians who had smiled up to the train-windows, offering fruit and compliments. I could see the green beetle-wing glint of tiles on the Cathedral of Ferdinand and Isabella. It looked heavy and uninteresting. Had we come all the way from England for this? I asked myself gloomily. Still, I did not say to Sarah that I was disappointed, though I saw by her face as the omnibus jolted us past dull shops and hideously decorated apartment houses, that she was wondering why we had travelled so far to see Granada.

Just then, we turned into a shadowy street, narrow as a lane, and began to go steeply uphill.

On either side were curiosity shops, whose windows were filled with bright fans and tortoise-shell combs; and through open doors we could see very old women and very young girls making lace on frames.

At the top was a great stone archway which I knew, from the book I had read, must be the one built by Charles the Fifth; and beyond that was a deep greenness, as if a bright emerald curtain had been let down behind the gateless barrier.

On the omnibus rattled, climbing higher, until the mules had trotted under the stone arch, plunging into the sudden coolness and gloom of a forest. I was gazing up an avenue of giant elms, like a vast arbour, and even over the sound of wheels and the hoofs of mules I could catch the music of running water. It poured a stream of

silver down a shallow channel on each side of the brown road. Singing as it came, it bathed the feet of the tall trees which rose out of it; and I remembered an old Spanish saying, repeated by the cousin who sent me Irving's "Alhambra" when I was a child. "The three sweetest sounds on earth are the tinkle of gold pieces; the music of running water; and the melody of the loved one's voice." It must have been some Moorish king of Granada, I thought, who invented that proverb; and as it echoed through my memory in tune with the voice of springs and fountains in the Alhambra wood, my heart gave a leap, but not of joy. A longing such as I had never known swept over me, with the breeze from the Sierra Nevada. It was the desire to love and be loved, with a love all different from Sarah's devotion.

CHAPTER V

WE went to a big, vaguely Oriental hotel close to the Alhambra, to which we had been recommended by the landlord at Gibraltar. In the open-air entrance court I had a shock of surprise. A group of people were laughing together, and chatting in English, in front of a curiosity shop. Evidently the tourist season was not over at Granada, and this hotel had a number of guests still. But it was too late to go away and try somewhere else for a quieter place. Already our luggage was being carried in by dark-faced servants, and I whispered to Sarah as we passed into a big white hall, "We'll have to be extravagant here, and take a private sitting-room, for I can't go down to meals with all those English people and Americans about. We can begin inquiring and looking round for a little furnished flat or house."

It was Sarah who engaged rooms and wrote our names in the visitors' book, while I hovered in the background, glad of my veil. But when I had heard that we could have a suite of three rooms and a bath for out-of-season prices, I summoned up courage to step forward.

"Till what time in the evening can we go into the Alhambra?" I asked of the manager, who spoke English.

"It closes at half-past six," he answered.

I looked at my watch—a present from Sarah.

"Five o'clock!" I said to her. "I don't think I can wait until to-morrow."

"Very well, dearie, how'd you like to go now, and when you come back I'll have the rooms nice and homey?" Sarah suggested.

"But you mustn't do the unpacking alone. You aren't strong enough. It will spoil my pleasure if you do."

"All right," she mildly consented. "I can just put the little things about, and leave the big ones for you to help with when you come back. But don't you want to see the rooms first?"

"No," I said. "They're sure to be nice. Only I don't like going to the Alhambra for the first time without you."

"You needn't mind," she assured me. "One place is mighty near the same as another to me, as long as you're happy. I'd as lief not see it till to-morrow, and I reckon I wouldn't shed tears if 'twasn't to be till day after."

A minute more, and Sarah had disappeared in the elevator, followed by a liveried boy with our bags and umbrellas. It only remained to ask the way to the Alhambra, which was easy to describe, and but a short distance.

I passed through a burning pool of sunshine and then was fanned by the freshness of the forest. There in the green dusk, a nightingale had begun its evening song, and the running waters sang with it. There was a bitter-sweet fragrance of ferns and moss, and moist earth drinking in its evening draught. I could see that it must always be cool and golden-green in these long avenues under the elms, for the sunshine could but leak through the arching roof in

a few gold drops. Never had I been in a place so peace-giving, and I walked slowly, stopping at a fountain whose mossy stone base was a sheet of moving crystal.

On a stone seat lolled an elderly brown man with sombrero tilted back and to one side above the level line of his eyebrows. He had a tray of sugared cakes to sell, though there was no one to buy; and instinct told him so surely that I was no client that he did not offer his wares. Next to him, however, sat a withered old woman, with a bright-coloured handkerchief tied over her hair. She had a basket of magnolia buds folded in packets of their own glossy, brown-lined green leaves, and tied with grass.

As I came near, she held up the basket, and perfume came out from the jackets, filling the air. With a stab of remorse I remembered that I had left at Ronda the oleanders I had likened to myself. No doubt they would have been thrown out to fade. I might better have let them grow since my pity had done them only harm; but I could not resist the magnolias. I bought two, all I could carry in comfort, though they had been gathered with just enough woody stem to make a handle for each. Then I went on to the Alhambra, turning, as I had been directed, past the immense bulk of Charles the Fifth's unfinished palace; and in two or three minutes I was buying my ticket of entrance for the Alhambra.

I wanted one, I said, which would be good for many weeks. Already I was making up my mind that I must live here for a very long time, and my heart was beating at the thought of the jewel I was about to see. Nothing could rob me of my love of

beauty and the joy it gave. It was, I told myself, the link which united me with happier women.

As I talked to a Spanish official who could speak French, a number of people passed on their way out of the Alhambra.

"Mademoiselle is late," he said. "Everybody else is going. Or if a few are left, they will be leaving soon."

"But surely I have more than an hour before closing time?" I asked, frightened lest I had lingered too long by the fountain. Still, I did not miss hearing the "Mademoiselle." It made me feel younger, and as if I had thrown off some burden, or else as if the burden were invisible to others.

"Yes," he answered, "there is a little more than an hour, but for some reason most people leave a good while before the Alhambra shuts, even in the summer, when it is as light at half-past six as at noon. We often notice that. Will mademoiselle have a guide?"

"No, thank you," I said, "not to-day. I don't want to learn things at first. I want only to see them."

The man smiled indulgently, indicating the door by which I could go from the office-room into some bright space beyond, which I could see through the glass. I went through; and had left the world I knew to enter a world of centuries ago.

It was a haunted world, of "Arabian Nights Tales," and I was dazed by the beauty of its fairy-palace. Yet I felt at home, as if I knew the place and had a right in it.

I was in the Patio de la Alberca, the marble-paved court of the great pond bordered with myrtle. The

Tower of Comares reared its square bulk against the blue of an unclouded sky. The tiles of the gallery-roof glittered in the sun, like eyes in a peacock's tail. Through the doorway underneath I could see the ivory-like walls and jewelled dado of the Hall of Ambassadors, and I could look through the windows of the immense room, far off to a vague opal glimmer of sky and tree-branches. I stood in the shadow which lay in a clearly defined line along the pavement, like a strip of black marble joining the white; and from my feet to the other end of the patio stretched the water of the bathing-pool. Its colour was the green of emeralds, but more opaque. Still, it was transparent enough to show the forms of fish brilliant as water-flowers under the surface.

No one was near. I seemed to have the silent palace to myself, and I threw my veil over my hat, so that my eyes should lose nothing of detail and colour. The Tower of Comares, yellow-pink, the bright roof of the gallery and its delicate supporting pillars, the arched door and the dusk of the room beyond were all repeated in the marble-framed green mirror. I could see myself, too. The eyes looking down met eyes looking up from the water-world. I could not bear to raise my eyes, for it seemed that never should I see such beauty again. A ruffling breath of wind, and it would be blotted out. Besides, I had the conviction of a child, that into this fairyland would steal something still more wonderful, if I looked long enough; something like the visions which appear in crystals to the gaze of seers.

By and bye the green mirror began to hypnotise me. What I could see in it was all that was real. I was not sure that there was anything outside it.

Maybe I should see myself as I had been in another form centuries ago when I lived here, and the Alhambra was my home. Yes, if I were patient, I should know whether I had been a princess or a slave, and whether there had been some man who loved me.

I was almost afraid to wink, lest I should miss the expected vision, and as I stared into the mirror something new did come into the picture. A figure, dark in the shadow as a living silhouette, walked into the doorway, and stood there for a moment. It was the figure of a man, tall and straight and slim. He was bareheaded. He carried his hat in his hand. Under his arm was something red. It might be a book. Now he had begun to move again. He was walking slowly out from under the shadow of the gallery, coming along the patio towards me; but it did not occur to me to move, or even to pull down my veil. Half hypnotised as I was by the great green crystal, and the one moving form in it, the man had for me no existence in the outer world.

The spell would have broken if I had raised my head to see an ordinary person idling in the sunlight, passing me and going out of the Alhambra, home to some hotel or pension. For a minute he, whoever he was, should have the privilege of living in my fairy-land. He would never know what had happened to him, and when, unknowing, he faded out of the mirror he would cease to be, as a bubble dies in bursting, or a rainbow changes into mist.

This I felt; and enjoyed the feeling in peace, because I knew that my face was hidden. In stepping down to peer at the fish I had knelt on one knee.

Round the other I had clasped my hands, and was bending so far over that anyone passing could see no more than the crown of my hat and a long veil falling over my hair behind. So I remained, in the same position, without lifting my head, as the man in the mirror came closer. I was no longer looking at myself or at the goldfish. I was watching him, seeing his features take a kind of ethereal clearness as he drew near. At last, I could not have taken my eyes from his figure if I had tried. Although the real man could catch no glimpse of my real face, I began to guess that he must be able to see it in the water as I saw his, for the eyes in the mirror met mine in the mirror, and gave them some message. It was like two astral bodies meeting in space, while the bodies of flesh were far away, asleep.

He was moving so slowly now, that he appeared hardly to move at all. This would make the vision in the crystal last longer. I was glad. I did not want it to end. It was not like romance. It *was* romance.

Yes, the red thing under his arm was a book. I wondered what book, and was sorry that I should never know. He was dressed in gray flannels. In his buttonhole was stuck a scarlet pomegranate blossom, the sacred flower of Granada. He had a rather low, soft collar, out of which his firm brown throat rose. His face was deeply burned by the sun, all but the highest part of the broad forehead, which looked white by contrast. I could almost have smiled to see how the line of white was aslant. Evidently he pushed his hat always to one side. This slanting line of brow gave a quaint effect. I glanced at the hat swinging in his hand. It was a Panama,

sunburned like his face. He must have had it a long time. Perhaps he loved it and hated to get a new one. Once I had felt like that about some of my things. He walked well. In the sheet of green water he seemed to glide noiselessly. The upper part of his face was beautiful. I thought that the arch of his eyebrows would have made him look like a saint in some old picture, if his lips had not been too full and his chin too square for the face of a conventional saint. I fancied that his eyes must be blue. They had an effect of being light in contrast with his dark skin, and black eyebrows and hair; but the sun in them dazzled mine as if I were looking at something too bright. I did not ask myself whether he were a handsome man or not. Maybe the real man would not be beyond the ordinary, but I did not want to know what he was like. The face and the eyes looking out of the mirror might be worth all the world to a woman, and they were mine to keep forever, if I chose. He would not dream of my dream.

We looked long at each other in the water, as he slowly passed. Then he was gone out of the picture.

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I waked up from the dream. I knew that a man had come out from the Hall of the Ambassadors, had walked past me, and was still in the Patio de la Alberca. If I turned, I could see what he was like. Possibly he would be looking back. But not for anything would I have turned. Even the Tower of Comares and the pillars and the orange-trees and myrtle borders were more beautiful in the mirror of

water than they were in themselves. There was just the difference between the real and the ideal.

I stopped without moving, until I was certain the man had gone. Then I got up and walked through an inconspicuous door into the Court of Lions.

CHAPTER VI

I FOUND other courts of the Alhambra as beautiful as the Patio de la Alberca; but none seemed so wonderful that evening. Still, I stayed till the last minute. I was the latest visitor, and it was after half-past six when the door of the dull little office shut behind me. Nothing could be seen of the fairy palace but the plain red-brown walls, and brown-tiled roofs with which Moorish men loved to conceal the secret splendour of their dwellings.

I thought that I knew the way back very well, and I should have known it, if I had not been thinking of other things. Somehow, I got on the wrong road, and there was nobody to direct me; but instead of worrying, I was pleased. To lose myself seemed part of the spell. And I was still wandering in the precincts of the Alhambra.

Presently I came to a tall iron gate. It was wide open, but as I drew near a man on the other side began to shut it. Thinking that I wanted to enter, he shook his head, saying something in Spanish which I took to mean, "It is too late."

Until he said this, I had no wish to go farther, but when it was forbidden, I felt a desire to see what was on the other side of the gate. Also, in the exalted mood not yet thrown off, I could not bear

to go back to the hotel and help Sarah unpack our trunks. I wanted to stay out of doors, and be alone.

I took two pesetas out of my purse and held them up. The man stopped shutting the gate. He began to talk again in Spanish. I thought that he said, "It is closing time, but if the Señorita wishes to walk through, let her do so. I will wait here until she comes out." I understood this more from gestures than words; and, nodding my thanks, I marched briskly through the gateway. I hoped to show him by walking quickly that I knew what he meant, and would return in a few minutes.

I was in a large, straggling wood, surrounded with red walls. There were many trees, and a few rough paths cut through the long grass. As I turned away, the man called out to attract my attention, and pointed towards two distant towers. Evidently they were the attractions here, and this walled, wooded space being part of the Alhambra, the gate was supposed to close for the night. I hurried on along a brown path under young trees to the first tower, which must always have been outside the palace precincts, though perhaps at one time not out of the gardens. I remembered that Washington Irving told of a tower where a princess had been imprisoned. Perhaps this was the place. Murray spoke of it, too, and of another tower near by, but I had forgotten the names. Beautiful windows supported by marble pillars suggested that there was something worth seeing inside; but the door of the tower was fastened. I knocked and called. No one came, and I realised that permission to walk through the wood did not include a late visit to the towers. I must wait till another day for the sight-seeing, but I was not sorry I had come in. There was a beauty in the desola-

tion of the place, and the sky was golden behind the trees.

I began to take bearings, and to realise that one of the ruined red walls was a wall of the Alhambra itself. I could see a church, and the backs of some curiosity-shops which had fronts higher up near the palace of Charles the Fifth. In the ill-kept wood there were two or three small houses, and a half-ruined, half patched-up tower where perhaps a guardian lived. There was even a pension, behind a wall with flowers falling over it; and there was another wall, in front of which I stopped as if a voice had called me. It was a very high wall, and very old, its white plaster yellow in patches, and splashed with pink and purple under the mass of convolvulus cascading over the top, as if generations of flowers had dyed it with their petals.

In the wall was a gate of cedarwood carved in squares like the oldest doors in the Moorish palace; and it was because this gate stood ajar that I stopped. Evidently it opened into a private garden, and I had no right to peep, but I could not resist. A path led straight on, and in the middle of it, not more than six yards from the gate, was an old stone fountain, spraying plumes of spun glass into a shallow basin and beyond, over moss and weeds that choked the gravel; ill-kept but beautiful borders of myrtle encroached upon the path, and walled with green the tangled masses of flowers which had once been carefully planned beds. The scent of orange flowers and magnolias fanned out to me, and I caught the tinkle of water, which seemed to come from many directions. I thought it was like a garden of dreams, not gray and terrible as the dream that haunted me, but gentle and mysterious, like the perfume of flowers

in moonlight. I wondered if there were a villa out of sight beyond the thicket of orange and magnolia trees and cypresses which made a screen behind the fountain.

As I stood, longing to push the cedar gate wider open, an elderly man ambled down the path. He had been gathering oranges, and was coming out with them in a basket. I retreated, ashamed of my curiosity and afraid he might scowl at me, but instead he smiled blandly. He was fat and brown, with oily skin, and so little hair on his large round head that he looked like a monk, in spite of his sombrero. His sloping eyes, set far apart on either side of a wide nose, with a flat bridge and a wrinkle straight across it, blinked mildly like the eyes of a sheep.

"Carmen de Santa Catalina," he said, and more which I could not understand. But I knew that Carmen was Spanish for garden. I wanted so much to ask questions about the garden that I felt desperate in my forced dumbness.

Seeing that I did not understand him, the man whom I took to be a gardener came out and locked the gate with an immense key, which looked as if it might be a hundred years old. Then, touching his sombrero, he walked away with an odd gait, which I thought like a big armchair moving from side to side on legs set at the corners. I walked away too, remembering that I was trying the patience of the guardian at the entrance of the wood. But seeing the big key turned in one of the cedarwood squares had made an exciting idea jump into my head. I wondered if in the garden there were a house not lived in, and, if so, whether it would be possible for us to take it. I could hardly wait to get back to

the hotel, hoping the manager might know about the Carmen de Santa Catalina.

It turned out that he did know. The place had belonged in old days to a Spaniard who was a student of Moorish history and dialects. He had died many years ago, and the Carmen had been bought by a Frenchman believed to have Arab blood. He had been rich, but had somehow lost his money. Then he killed himself, but not at Granada. He had been far away at Monte Carlo, it was rumoured. Meanwhile he had married a Spanish wife, the daughter of a curiosity-shop keeper down in the town. There was a house in the garden, but the widow did not like it, and had gone back to live with her father. Now she was middle-aged, and kept the shop herself. Sometimes she let the Carmen de Santa Catalina, but not often, for the house was dilapidated. There was little furniture, and the owner refused to buy anything new for tenants. This the manager knew because he had once or twice had people in the hotel who were looking for furnished villas on the Alhambra hill; but they had said the Carmen de Santa Catalina was impossible. Besides, it was inconvenient, having the gate of entrance to the woods shut up at night, for there was no other way of getting to the Carmen; and some people would be afraid to live so near the Tower of The Infantas, and the Cattiva, which were believed by the superstitious to be haunted.

"I should like to live there," I said.

The manager smiled.

"Perhaps you would think differently if you saw the house; and the garden is in bad condition. The old fellow who looks after it does nothing except take care of the orange-trees and the grapes

for his mistress. Still, I can give you her name and address."

I saw by his manner that he was sure I would never live in the Carmen de Santa Catalina; but I was just as sure that if I could, I would. I made up my mind to go the first thing in the morning to the curiosity-shop kept by the widow of the Arab-Frenchman.

By this time it was past seven o'clock, and I let the elevator take me up to the floor of the suite which I had not seen.

There were long cool corridors running from end to end on each storey of the hotel; and our rooms were in the middle of one. I knew the numbers, but lingered for an instant looking at a trunk standing outside a door next one of ours. It was a leather portmanteau which had seen much service.

There were all sorts of labels on it, like decorations on an old soldier's breast, and the name painted in white letters on the end towards me was a soldier's name: Captain H. St. J. Shannon. There were labels of hotels in Cairo and Port Said, Alexandria and other eastern places which made me thrill with longing, almost with envy; and among the newest-looking was a white slip with "P. and O." printed on it, and the name *Mooltan*.

"Our ship!" I said to myself. "Perhaps this portmanteau was put on board her at Port Said or somewhere for Gibraltar before she went to England last time." I thought about the *Mooltan*, steaming on at this moment through the blue Mediterranean on her way to the far east, whence this trunk had come; and I thought of all the places the label-covered thing had seen, if only it could tell. I felt drawn to it somehow, because of its unknown adven-

tures, and because it had travelled so far in our ship, maybe in one of our state-rooms. I was listening to a temptation which said, "Look and see the number of the cabin on the white label," when the door of the room was thrown open. Instantly I grasped the handle of my own door, and would have darted in, if I had not seen a large bunch of wild oleanders dripping water in the hands of a hotel chambermaid. She had a disgusted look on her face, and was holding the long stems of the flowers in a torn bit of paper, so as not to touch them with her hand.

"Oh," I exclaimed in French, "are you going to throw those away?"

"But, yes, mademoiselle," she answered in the same language—luckily for me. "The monsieur in this room has brought them not knowing that they carry fever and misfortune. I am going to have them burned before he comes in to dress for dinner. They are very bad things, and I would be sorry to have them harm him."

"Perhaps he will be angry," I said.

"I think he will not notice, mademoiselle. But I will get for his vase some better flowers."

"Here, take this magnolia," I said, offering her one of the two buds I had bought in the packets of their own leaves. "It will open out and be lovely if you cut the knot of grass; and you can give me the oleanders instead. I like them."

"Mademoiselle is not afraid of the evil spirit?"

"No," I said. "I don't believe in it. Poor oleanders, how sad they must feel because people say cruel things."

The girl laughed.

"It is said, too, that if they can give a curse, they

can take it off. But that does not concern made-moiselle."

"Still, I should like to have them," I insisted; and she put the branches into my hands, taking one of my magnolias instead. I was pleased with this episode, because in leaving Ronda I had forgotten the oleanders gathered for pity's sake. Now it seemed that I might atone.

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Sarah had unpacked everything, after all. I might have known she would. Of course she made meek excuses for not keeping her promise.

"Deed, Miss Nita, I was that tired sittin' in the cars so long, I felt right glad to stir around and get the cramp out of my bones. There wasn't another livin' thing to do *but* unpack, or I'd a done it, to please you. Anyways, I got through a long time ago, and I've been enjoyin' myself real well lookin' at the nice view."

Her "nice view" was down from the great height of the hotel windows over the brown roofs and open patios of Granada, and the blue-green plain of the Vega away to far mountains, the Last Sigh of the Moor. Our rooms looked south, and would have been hot but for a cool wind from the Sierra Nevada. They were very Spanish rooms, I thought, with their white walls, tiled floors, and crimson curtains. Though they were not pretty, I liked them for their novelty, and Sarah had made them almost home-like with the few sofa-cushions and bits of drapery and books we had brought. Neither of us had any framed photographs to carry on our travels. The only one I had kept, the picture of my mother with me—a little child—by her side, was not one I could

let be seen. It was wrapped in paper at the bottom of my trunk.

Sarah did not like my oleanders, so instead of using them to adorn the little *salon* between our rooms, I put them into a jug of water in my own bedroom. While I was arranging them, a man next door—the door of the leather portmanteau—began to whistle softly, but not so softly that I could not hear him distinctly through the wall. He had come in, as the maid said he would, to dress for dinner. He was not angry about the loss of his oleanders, or he would not be whistling, I thought. No man could whistle so melodiously if his temper were upset. Perhaps he liked my magnolia better than the oleanders. The bud would be wide open now, and sending out a cloud of perfume.

Never had I heard such musical whistling. He might almost have been a professional, so flute-like were his trills. I thought that he must be young, and rather pleasant or good-looking, or the chambermaid would not have troubled to protect him by taking away the oleanders.

At first he whistled some Irish air which I had heard, but had forgotten. Then he went straight through the "Toreador" song from "Carmen," and at last, to my surprise, he began to whistle a very old darkey ballad, "Weep no more, my lady." It was a plantation song of the slave days, many years before I was born; but Sarah often crooned it in her high, thin voice, to put me to sleep at night when I was a tiny child. I used to love, and ask for it. "Weep no more," I called it, though perhaps it had some other name which I didn't know, for I never heard anyone sing it except Sarah. Now this man, probably an Englishman, Captain H. St. J. Shannon,

owner of the leather portmanteau, was whistling a song of the Southern slaves. I wondered where he could have learned it, and hearing the old tune made my heart begin to beat fast. But, after all, he did not know the air very well. The flute-like notes stopped suddenly. He went back to the beginning again, and broke down at the same place. Then he began to sing the tune, in a tenor voice almost deep enough for a baritone, with a thrilling quality in it. From the whistling I had thought it would be lighter. It was so sweet, so sad, that tears came to my eyes, though the voice on the other side of the wall was singing "Weep no more, my lady."

Once more he broke down on the same note. He had forgotten the rest of the tune, and like the singing bullfinches trained in darkness, he had always to go back to the beginning.

I was tempted to take up the song where he had to leave off, and sing it through for him. How surprised he would be! And he would never know who prompted him. Whenever he sang the song afterwards he would think of me, making up some sort of image in his mind, where I would live as a mystery. It was all I could do to resist, but I did resist. Somehow the old Southern tune seemed to go well with the soft, sleepy fragrance of magnolias. I wondered if he thought so too, and if the perfume had suggested that song to his remembrance. I should have liked to know; but now the idea was connecting itself in my mind with magnolias, I believed that I should always think of the song and the beautiful white flowers together.

"Weep no more, my lady!" . . . He kept on trying, again and again, until the inspiration came,

and with triumph he whistled the whole air from beginning to end. Evidently Captain H. St. J. Shannon was not a man easily discouraged when he made up his mind to do a thing. Almost, I clapped my hands in applause; but not quite. And it was really a relief when I heard his door open and shut, which it did immediately after he had accomplished his aim. He was going down to dinner. I believed that he must have waited to remember the end of the tune, and that he had determined not to leave the room until he did so.

I liked him for his obstinacy, and envied him because he had no reason to hide himself. He could go happily to dinner in a big, gay restaurant, meeting all the eyes, and giving back their looks. Yes, I did envy him! He did not know how fortunate he was. No oleanders could bring him bad luck. I pictured him tall, and rather swaggering, with light wavy hair, cut very short, and laughing blue eyes with curled-up lashes.

Sarah and I dined together in our sitting-room, looking out on a flaming sunset which died to royal purple. She was tired afterwards and thought that I must be also; but the Alhambra, and the face in the pool, and the thought of the Carmen de Santa Catalina had excited me. I begged her to get ready for bed, and let me sit by the window looking out at the sky and the firefly lights of the Vega, when the waiter had cleared our table. At last she consented, and went to her room, which was on the left of the *salon*. Mine was on the right. Her door was partly open, and I could hear her stirring about. It made the place seem home-like that she should be there.

With my arms on the window-sill, and the cool breeze from the mountains on my face, I began in-

voluntarily to hum the air of "Weep no more, my lady." Sarah heard, and appeared in her doorway, slipping on her dressing-gown.

"Mercy me, Miss Nita!" she exclaimed. "You're singin' my old song. I ain't heard it for I don't know how many years."

"Why do you never sing it any more?" I asked, bringing my head back into the room from outside the window.

"Because—well, I never do sing anything, any more. Not for years. My! But I ain't forgotten that tune."

"Where did you learn it?" I asked. "You never told me. It must have been old, even in your day."

"I reckon it was. But it was mighty sweet, an' folks sort o' clung to it. 'Twas a young man learned it to me. His name was William. I don't know as I ever spoke to you about him. There was no call to speak, for you was no more'n a baby when we was goin' together, Will an' me."

"Were you in love with each other?" I asked eagerly.

"I liked him mighty well. An' he asked me to marry him. I said I would. We was engaged. But we couldn't be married just then; an' I got a place to take care of you. Folks thought I was a real good nurse, an' that was why your mama was set on havin' me. Afterward, when I'd had the care of you for a while, you just wound yourself round an' round my heart. You wasn't very strong, either. An' so when Will wanted me to come away an' be married, why—I just couldn't! I said I reckoned to stay till you got bigger, an' he took it into his head that I liked you better'n I did him. Maybe I did, too—but it kind o'

hurt when he went away an' took up with a cousin o' mine. Well, I reckon 'twas for the best."

"So that was your love story!" I said. "And I spoiled it for you. It was like me!"

"You can't hardly call it a love story. An' you didn't spoil it, darling. I wouldn't put it past Will to have gone back on me for Nance anyways. I reckon 'twas only an excuse."

She disappeared from the door, embarrassed, and regretting, maybe, that some impulse had led her to tell me the story. I half felt that I ought to follow and caress her, as if to make up for the wrong I had done in the past, beginning even as a baby to cheat her of her love. But something held me back, selfishness, I am afraid, though I tried to make myself believe that she would rather be alone just then.

Downstairs, the guests of the hotel were finishing their dinner. Three stories under my window, I could see them walking out through the long windows of the restaurant, on to a wide, roofless balcony, brilliantly lighted. There were many seats, and round tables dotted about on the tiled floor, and people took chairs by these small tables, to smoke cigarettes, and drink their after-dinner coffee.

I counted a dozen men, and twice as many women in evening dress. Their voices floated up to me. A few were talking French and Spanish, but most of them were English and Americans, by their voices. I had done right not to go down. Still, I felt lonely looking from my unlighted window on their gaiety, and I tried to pick out my whistling neighbour, Captain H. St. J. Shannon.

There was no fair-haired young man, no young man at all. The men were elderly or middle-aged. Most

of their heads were growing bald, as I could very well see.

"Is he old, then?" I asked myself, vaguely disappointed, because the voice had sounded gallant and young. But at that moment another man came out on the balcony, and seated himself at a little table away from all the others. He gave some order to a waiter, and laid a red book open on the table, as he struck a match to light a cigarette. The first match went out, and he struck another. Then he lifted his head, slightly puffing at the cigarette between his lips. His hair was black and thick, and I caught one glimpse of the face I had seen in the pool.

I felt the blood rush to my cheeks.

"Why!" I exclaimed, and said no more. I drew in my head, and pushed my chair back from the window.

In the night, before dawn, I heard faint, suppressed sounds in the room next mine. Someone was dressing. By and by someone was softly opening and closing the door. Captain H. St. J. Shannon was going away from Granada.

CHAPTER VII

IT was a long time before I could fall asleep again after my neighbour's stealthy night-flitting. I switched on the electric light by the bed, and glanced at my watch. It was two o'clock, but already the inhabitants of Granada were astir, or had not yet gone to rest. I got up and looked out of my window, and far below I could see lights in the patios, which in the night were like square plates of gold on enamel. Voices came up to me, scolding or laughing or singing in those illuminated wells. Watch-dogs bayed, and cocks crowed. Nearer, a nightingale sang. Seen and heard in the night, Granada might still have been a city of the Moors. I felt sure their ghosts must often return, trying to fit keys into vanished locks, or wishing to walk in gardens long ago built over with shops or blocks of flats.

I went back to bed, but as I was falling down the hill of sleep to my horror I saw the gray dream on its way to my bedside. Already I was under its influence, but I struggled to get away before it took hold of me. "I can't, I can't dream it here!" I heard myself saying. I tried to wake, for I realised that I was asleep. Then again I heard my own voice crying out, "Come and save me!" I hardly knew to whom I was calling, but it was not to Sarah. And the answer

I seemed to hear was a man's voice singing "Weep no more, my lady." That gave me the power to throw the horror off, and I woke, panting and sitting up in bed. But the dream was conquered before it had come near.

Instantly I thought of the oleanders. What was that the boy at Ronda said about a great joy or gift which could come with the oleander to a "person accursed," from another person more fortunate? I felt superstitious about the flower, though I had laughed at Sarah.

She was as much excited as I about the Carmen de Santa Catalina the next morning, and we got up early in spite of my disturbed night. I said nothing to her of the dream. If she heard that it had tried to come on my first night on the Alhambra hill, she would worry, and I could not explain what had driven it away.

When I opened my door into the corridor, I was surprised to see that the portmanteau was still there, for certainly my neighbour had dressed himself and gone out at two o'clock in the night. Also his door was wide open, and two maids were working in the room, with the feverish energy hotel servants seem to have only when they are cleaning the deserted quarters of one guest for the coming of another. I gave a glance in passing and saw on a table near the door an empty vase. Where was my magnolia? It could not have faded yet, for it was a bud yesterday afternoon, and the one I had kept was in full bloom of beauty. I wondered if the man had taken it with him. The thought that he must have done so pleased me, though I was glad he could not find out that his neighbour was the woman who had looked at him in the water mirror. I was glad, too, that he

had gone. I did not want ever to see the flesh and blood face more distinctly than I had seen it when looking down at the balcony, for if I passed close by, in the street or in a hotel corridor, it would cease to be ideal. I could not bear to have the memory dimmed by a commonplace reality which would lie over it in my brain, like a photograph taken on the same film with another.

I supposed that the portmanteau, now locked and strapped, was to be sent after its owner. I could have found out, if I had chosen to be curious and ask questions of the maids at work in the deserted room. But I did not choose.

I guided Sarah to the iron gate in the wall which enclosed the wood, hoping to get into the Carmen, but the cedar door was fastened. Though I tapped and called, no one came, and there was nothing to do but go down into Granada, to the address the hotel manager had given.

It was in a side street close to the Cathedral, a curiosity-shop not as picturesque as those on the Alhambra hill. This was sparsely furnished with wares, and the few bits of old china, fans, tortoiseshell boxes, and ivory crucifixes in the window were dusty and unattractive. Madame de Ferrand, the widow of the once rich Arab-Frenchman, was letting her business fall to pieces. Only a sleepy boy who could speak neither French nor English was in the shop, but he called the "Señora," and she rolled in like a wave, a very fat woman, clothed somehow in billows of coarse muslin, such as cooks put over meat-safes to keep the flies off. She must once have been gorgeously handsome. Fanning herself with an illustrated paper, devoted to the interests of the bull-ring, she listened to my proposition. She did not

interrupt, but as I talked her great eyes travelled slowly, almost without winking, over both our persons, from hats to shoes, finally resting on my veil. At last she shrugged her shoulders, looking as Oriental as a statue of Buddha. She would be pleased, she answered in bad French, to give us the key of the Carmen, and those of the house. Also she would be charmed to let the place for as long a time as we wanted it, provided we would pay each month in advance. But she was certain that we were not people to be content with the discomforts of the house. She was unlucky and always had been, since her husband died. It was not likely that her luck would change.

Looking at her and her untidy surroundings, it was easy to see why she was "unlucky." Still, it was honest of her not to raise our expectations by praising her property. She went to a Spanish desk, the only fine thing in the place (and the only thing not for sale), peering near-sightedly into drawer after drawer to find the keys. The desk was at the back of the shop, where there was no window, and in the brownish dusk the immense figure in its yellow-white dressing-gown loomed vague in outline as a swollen ghost.

She rummaged through two rows of drawers, muttering in Spanish as each one failed her, then began again at the beginning, and with a "Maria del Pilar!" clawed out a bundle wrapped in a dirty handkerchief of Spanish colours.

The entire contents of the red and yellow rag consisted of keys, mixed promiscuously together, large, middle-sized, and very small, innocent of labels.

"It is a long time since I have needed any of these," she apologised, with a sidelong glance at Sarah's disapproving face. "But I know many of

them by sight. The worst of keys is, they seem to breed, like mice or rabbits, and there are always ten times as many as when you saw them last."

Of the biggest key there was no doubt. She unhesitatingly pronounced it the key of the garden, of which Pepé, the gardener, had the duplicate. As for the others, it was a more difficult question. There were dozens, each of which wished to disguise itself as another. But yes, that was almost certainly the key of the back door, and if not, it did not matter, for Pepé kept one in his pocket, if he had not lost it. He was supposed to go in and air the house, once at least in every three or four months. Poor house, she herself had not been to see it for years, it made her too sad, with its memories of happiness! However, she used the oranges and lemons and the few grapes. If we took the place, which she did not believe possible, we must pay extra if we wanted the fruit. Ah, here was the front door key. She knew it because the handle was broken. And as for the keys of cupboards and chests of drawers, if we decided on living in the house, we might take this lot with us, and try them in their places. That would be the simplest way, as, after all, she had forgotten which was which, and her brain was not equal to the task of separating them. As for the rent, it was two hundred pesetas a month, or two hundred and fifty with house-linen and fruit. To the flowers, such as they were, we were welcome. But really, it was hardly worth while to talk business. Nothing would come of it!

"What a shiftless piece o' poor white trash!" said Sarah, with unusual sharpness; for with lazy, untidy women she had no sympathy. But I was sorry for Madame de Ferrand in her dusty shop, left high and

dry by the tide of fortune. Growing comfortably fat and reading about bull-fights were her consolations for the loss of her husband and the loss of her looks.

It was too much for Sarah to walk up the hill, so we found a cab. Strenuous exercise always drained her face of colour, and set her heart fluttering so piteously that mine ached with a guilty ache. Well I knew what was the strain which had weakened the faithful heart, and that but for me it might be strong and normal still.

Even the pleasant excitement of seeing the old villa in its garden, and deciding whether we could attempt housekeeping there, gave her that curious pallor round the eyes which I was beginning to know and understand.

"You mustn't say you would like to live in the villa just to please me, unless you really would," I said, when the moment came of fitting the big key into the lock of the garden gate.

"I reckon 'twill do me good and keep me goin' to have a house to look after, if 'tain't fallin' in over our heads," she answered cheerfully.

We looked for Pepé, but he was not in the garden. We had it to ourselves, and I was glad. I was glad, too, when Sarah sat down on a stone seat hot with the sun, at the side of the path leading from the gate to the fountain. She said that she was more concerned with the house than the garden, and as she was a little tired she would wait there for me till I was ready to unlock the villa. She could walk round the paths another time. I did not try to persuade her to change her mind, but I knew in my heart that she thought I would find it more congenial to be alone than to have her with me for the first time in this

place of sad, poetic beauty. It was true. I did want to be alone, but I was sorry she had found me out.

"I must live here. I *must* have this for my own," I said to myself, for the garden was speaking to me in many voices, voices of trees, voices of flowers, voices of fountains. I felt it was meant to be mine, and I couldn't give it up, no matter what the house might prove to be like.

What a haven! I thought. Behind the high wall and the locked cedar gate I should be as safe from the world as in a fortress. Even in the crowded season at Granada it would be the same. I need never be seen. No one could get at me. The place seemed made for me to live in for months or years. I knew that here I could never grow restless, and long to go somewhere else, as I had longed at Laburnum Lodge. It was true, as Sarah had known by instinct. That little house "wouldn't *do*." This would. In the garden, all the concentrated beauty of the world would be mine.

I followed the path from the gate, past the middle fountain, where another narrow path cut it across, straight on to a low white wall covered with ivy and honeysuckle and heliotrope. This was built on the edge of a sheer height, looking down over the Vega, and away, at the right, to the Sierra Nevada like banked white clouds along the horizon. The other three walls were so high as to be almost unclimbable, and no one could see over them, except by mounting a ladder. Along the low wall above the precipice ran a seat whose brick and stone showed through the ragged coat of stained white stucco, and at each of the two junctions of this low wall with the high, side walls, there was a simple summer-house of the kind called by the Spaniards a *mirador*: a mere lookout

place of four pillars and a roof overgrown with flowers, built to command the view. One of these miradors was at the end of the garden; the other was beyond but not far from the house, which I could just see through a thicket of orange and magnolia trees, with here and there the silver arbour of an olive or a dark spire of cypress. From tree to tree branches of wistaria and rose vines had looped themselves lovingly for companionship, as the years slept in the garden; and all that was visible of the house through the maze was a brown-tiled roof and a few small windows framed in blazing flowers. The intersecting paths were overgrown with grass, and at their junctions were fountains or stone-rimmed sunken basins edged with myrtle. All the neglected flower-beds, which were square in shape, and the plantations of orange-trees had myrtle hedges, once neatly trimmed, no doubt, but now putting out irregular sprouts like little green hands beckoning, or asking alms. Round each fountain ran a narrow cushion of velvet moss where the water had sprayed year after year. They reminded me of the long, green-covered sandbags which old-fashioned people put against window-frames to keep out the draught. Some of the myrtle-trimmed beds were given up to roses, which passed from birth to death untended, but lovely in all phases. Others were filled with Madonna lilies glistening like marble where the sun found them, between the branches of a magnolia set in the centre like a green-and-white brocaded umbrella. Two immense box-trees had been hollowed out in the middle to make summer-houses, and smaller ones, done in the same way, were dark niches for old garden statues. Along the edge of each path and each flower-bed deep gutters had been cut, for running water.

They were half choked with fallen leaves and a *pot-pourri* of flower petals, wet from last night's irrigation, though now the fountains were still.

There was no wind this morning, and the garden was a great bowl of perfume, almost stifling in its sweetness. A million insects were tuning tiny fiddles and beating microscopic drums. Now and then a bird let fall a liquid note, in secrecy of shadow; and where the sun was hottest white butterflies danced up and down like spray from a hidden fountain.

It was a long time before I could leave the green gloom of the intersecting paths, and the hot flowery wall looking over the Vega. Even then I explored one of the miradors before going to call Sarah. Rickety wooden steps led up into it, and the open façade towards the garden was thickly covered with a mass of convolvulus. Inside was a three-legged table, fallen down, and a chair which would certainly have collapsed if I had trusted myself to it. A lizard ran in front of my feet, and a family of baby bats clung upside-down to the broken roof. As I looked over the sea-like expanse of the Vega, I heard Sarah's voice calling :

"Where are you, Miss Nita? I'm gettin' 'most worried."

She had been on a small exploring expedition of her own, and had feared that I might have fallen over the low parapet, built on the edge of the height.

"My, but it's a pretty garden!" she said. "Real wild and over-run; but I reckon with a man who knew his business and wasn't afraid o' work, we could make it right sweet. You'd like to have it, wouldn't you? And the price is mighty cheap, if there's any house at all."

"We'll go and see," I said, almost trembling lest

the villa should turn out to be impossible. But to my intense joy, it was far better than either of us had dared expect. The outside was as unpretentious as houses built by Moors, a mere yellow-white box with small windows protected by brown wooden shutters. But its shabby stucco was almost hidden by flowering plants, golden-hearted roses, and huge bunches of wistaria.

The front door was of Moorish fashion—Spanish fashion, too; a rusty iron *grille*; a tiled vestibule; a carved door of faded cedarwood. In an old lamp hanging desolately from the painted ceiling a bird had built a nest and tired of it, maybe years ago.

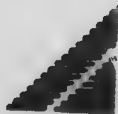
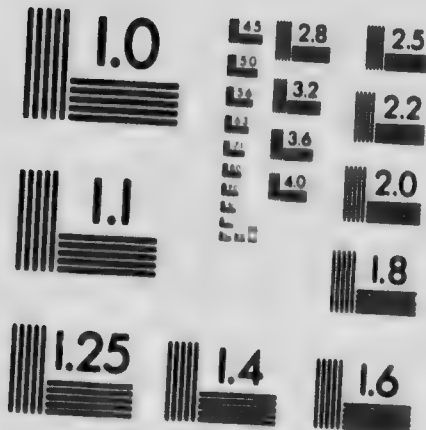
Inside, all was in darkness, because of the barred wooden shutters. We had to grope our way across the first room, guided by knife-blades of light at the cracks. The place smelled musty, and was cold. Sarah was afraid lest a rat should run across our feet. I laughed at her, and was surprised at my own strength as I forced open the tightly jammed French windows and prized up the bars. Sarah could not have done it.

It was a strange room which we saw when I had let in air and sunshine. The walls were done in arabesques and beehive work, copied from the Alhambra, perhaps by Monsieur de Ferrand, who was supposed to have Arab blood. The floor of the hall was tiled, but this room, with a dado of brilliant tiles, was paved with many different woods, in an intricate pattern. There was brown oak and lighter olive, flesh-pink eucalyptus, and pale yellow and white and greenish woods which I did not know. The floor was done in stars, with rays of different colours. Windows were bare of curtains, and for furniture



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there were but a few dilapidated chairs and tables, once handsome, but with their red velvet upholstery ragged and faded now, past hope.

Other rooms were not so pretentious, but all were of fair size, with high ceilings. Most of the furniture and some of the windows were broken. The kitchen regions were depressing, and there was scarcely a whole plate or cup in the house. The cooking arrangements puzzled Sarah; and the table linen and bedding were unfit for use; but if we were willing to spend a little money we could make ourselves comfortable in a primitive way. The prospect of buying things enchanted Sarah, for she had a reckless enjoyment of spending money, if it were to give me pleasure. In a small black bag she always wore hanging from her belt she kept little blunt ends of pencil, and half-sheets of paper economically saved. Walking from room to room, she made two separate lists: one of things we must get; the second of things it would be nice to have.

"There's plenty of money, Miss Nita," she repeated several times, when I opened my eyes at the growing length of the first list, added to moment by moment from the second. "There's all the legacy from my poor uncle John. My! I shan't spend it while I live, not if I try. And there's yours, that's been pilin' up an' up year after year. I'm sure your mama would like you to spend it makin' yourself happy."

We were both remembering at that moment other money I might have had, money which would have made me rich; but neither of us spoke of it. That belonged to the subject which we never mentioned. I hated even to think of it in this house where I hoped to begin my new life. And I saw myself drawing a

sharp line between the past and the present, as one might cut an apple in two parts.

"When do you think we can come in, Sarah?" I asked. "Oh, *do* let's make it soon, even if we have to engage an army of people to get things straight for us at first."

She thought for a minute before answering, lost in calculation. As I watched her, I could not help noticing how old she looked, when her features relaxed, without any attempt at brightness. Bent slightly down as her face was, the delicate covering of flesh hung loose, in long, straight lines like those in a white cloth that has been wet and hung up to dry.

"We'll come to-morrow!" she exclaimed so suddenly that I started. I had just been telling myself that it was time I began to take care of her. She was wearing herself out in trying to make me forget.

"To-morrow!" I echoed. "Do you really think so? How splendid! Our *real* life together will begin to-morrow—in this garden—a new world, just for us."

She looked at me with her tremulous, loving smile that made one side of the prettily prim mouth go up higher than the other.

"I'm mighty glad you think you'll be happy, dearie. Gladder'n I can tell. But if you're goin' to *stay* happy, there ought to be somebody else in the garden for you besides me."

Just then a brown face with sloped, sheep-like eyes looked smiling in at the open window.

"There'll be Pepé," I said.

BOOK II
THE REALITY

CHAPTER I

AFTER we began our life in the Carmen de Santa Catalina, I did not stir outside the garden gate for more than a week, not even to go into the palace of the Alhambra.

This was because, when Sarah and I were shopping in the town, buying things for the villa, I saw go by in an omnibus belonging to a hotel on the hill, a man and woman—husband and wife—whom I used to know when I first lived in London. They had not been friends of mine nor had they ever been enemies, merely acquaintances; but I could not bear to run the risk of meeting them. They were people who travelled a good deal, and it was not a very strange coincidence to run across them here, in a place of world-famous interest, even out of season. When we decided upon coming to Granada, I knew that among many tourists there might be a few old acquaintances, and I took the chance of that. But, from the first, I planned to find a villa where I could hide myself; and I had been fortunate, for the Carmen de Santa Catalina, with its high walls, its Moorish garden, and its glorious view, was ideal for my purpose.

We settled in hurriedly with Pepé, Pepé's wife, and a few more or less useful relatives of theirs to help us. For several days life was a wild picnic, but I enjoyed it, and Sarah was in her element. A cab

from Granada was engaged to take her down the hill and back every day, until all that we needed was bought; and her extraordinary and highly original French (picked up in the years at Paris) served her well in the shops. Nobody knew English, but most of the tradespeople had a few words of French. When we settled down, we had as servants only Pepé, and a sister of his whom we engaged to come and help Sarah every day between the hours of eight in the morning and eight in the evening. Pepé asked for an assistant in the garden, if we wished to have things well kept; but I had set my heart upon gardening myself. I wanted work in the garden, and learning Spanish, to be my occupations. Already I had a kind of fondness for old Pepé of the flat-bridged nose and blinking eyes. I had discovered that his ears, under scallops of silvered black hair, were pointed, and he seemed like a soft-mannered, elderly faun, reluctantly dressed in modern clothes. I felt that when I could speak with him in his own language, he would be a congenial presence in the garden; but I did not like the long-lipped, beetle-browed young nephew who worked with him for a few days, so the assistant idea was vetoed. Pepé : his head at this, but soon he found that he loved it, I could really help him.

at which he set me was the cutting away of dead roses from among the living ones. It kept me busy for hours each day, for nothing had been done since the roses began to bud. I did not care, when on our sixth day in the Carmen, Sarah reported seeing Sir Henry and Lady Moffat still at the Washington Irving, sitting in front of the hotel when she passed. I had grown so infatuated with the walled garden that I had no wish to leave it for an hour. I had been to the Alhambra only once, but

already I could go back to it in memory, walking from court to court, seeing more distinctly than any other the Patio de la Alberca with the picture reflected in its water-mirror. The Alhambra would wait, I said to myself, as it had waited hundreds of years for me to come home to it. By and by the Moffats and the other tourists would be gone. In July, and afterwards, for many months, it would be almost as if the Alhambra groves and the palace belonged to me alone. Meanwhile, I had the garden, and the view over the low wall of the miradors; the old town beneath, with its roofless patios secret to the world on their own level, but open to me and the birds. There, if I liked, I could observe family quarrels and love-makings. I could hear girls singing over their work; I could see mothers teaching half-naked brown babies to walk, and children playing with dogs and lambs, and old women milking goats. I could look out over the Vega of changing colours, never twice the same, its sunrises and sunsets, its twilights, and the yellow flowers of light that blossomed in the blueness of evening. After the heat of the day was gone from the garden, and the water had begun to swirl round the myrtle-edged flowerbeds, and ripple like silver snakes down each side of the transverse paths, I could stroll along the grass-grown walks, and see the seven fountains sparkling under the trees like flowers of glass. All the air would then be full of music: the notes of nightingales—our own nightingales singing the garden to sleep; the bubble and murmur of waters; the chiming of church bells down in Granada; the laughter of children softened by distance; and sometimes the strumming of guitars. Then I could picture young Spanish men in cool, narrow streets I could not see,

serenading girls, who peeped out from behind iron bars and threw roses from sleek black hair when the music stopped. It was better to imagine this than to see it, because I was able to paint the men as handsome and the girls as beautiful as I chose.

Early in the morning, too, I could go to the garden gate, and see Pepé's sister, Marta of the glorious eyes and shadowy moustache, taking in the milk, and the bread. A witch-like old woman brought the milk, not in cans, but in goats jingling with bells, who were stopped outside the gate, and milked before our eyes, into big jugs which Marta carried from our kitchen. The bread arrived in panniers on a small donkey with tasselled and embroidered harness. While its driver stopped to gossip, the little animal would lean in abandonment against a tree, and appear to sleep, if but for a minute.

Never before, though I had seen beautiful gardens, had I made friends with a garden; but soon our Carmen was my friend. I got to know each tree intimately, and all the flowers' faces, though they were so many. I began to see that each face was different from the others, as with human beings and animals. I thought there was a difference even in the perfume. The roses expressed themselves for me, and each bud was a note in the song of colour. I laid my ear against the trunks of trees, and it seemed as if I could hear the whisper of the sap in their veins. If I happened to wake early, I would steal downstairs and out of the house in my nightgown, sure that there was no one to spy upon me, and wade through the ghost-blue sea of the dawn till the sun came up. Then, when the veil of dewdrops spread over the heads of the flowers, began to glitter, I would bend down and bathe my face. The pure sweetness of this "wine of the

sky" gave me a pleasure different from any I ever knew, even when I was a child. And I was glad that I could help give back its youth to the deserted garden, just as life and work in it were giving back mine to me.

On the tenth day, in the afternoon, Sarah told me that the Moffats had gone. She had seen them in the hotel omnibus which was piled with their luggage.

"Now you needn't stay penned up any longer behind this gate," she said. "You can go out as much as you please. And there don't seem to be anybody left, hardly. I don't meet a soul when I'm drivin' down, except the Spanish."

"But I don't call this being penned up," said I. "Once I used to pity the Lady of Shalott, but not now."

Sarah looked blank.

"I don't know as I ever heard you speak of her before, but I know you used to have plenty o' friends with titles. I'm mighty glad you're happy here, honey, an' so am I, happier than I ever thought I could be, even a little while ago when things began to come right. Still, it ain't natural for a young lady like you, livin' like this forever, without any interests but a garden. I want something to *happen to you*, Miss Nita."

"Oh, no, enough has happened to me!" I cried out. "For heaven's sake don't let's have any more!"

"I mean good things," she explained. "The kind of things that ought to happen to a beautiful——"

"Dearest old friend," I cut her short, "it's no use pretending that I'm like other people. We both know that I'm one apart—like the bat in the fable I used to be

so sorry for when I was little, because it wasn't bird or beast, and could have no friends among either."

"There's no reason why you shouldn't have friends—make new ones, of course!" Sarah exclaimed, excitedly. "The garden, and just livin' ain't enough—anyhow they won't be enough long."

"But I'm going to have a new interest. Now the Moffats are out of the way, I shall walk over to our hotel one day soon, and ask about somebody to teach me Spanish. You can learn too if you like."

"No, I thank you, dearie. My French will do for me. I can pick up what Spanish I need from hearin' you speak it. I ain't equal to learnin' new things. What I want is to see you happy the way a woman ought to be happy, an' then I can just lay comfortably down an' die, if I feel like it."

"Oh, Sarah, don't talk so!" I implored. "You're not ill?"

"No, not a mite ill, only kind of tired sometimes, as if 'twould be a rest to let the machinery stop. I ain't goin' to do that, though, not if I can help it, an' I reckon I can, till you've got a strong arm to lean on, a whole sight stronger than mine ever was, at the best. I want you to meet some good, splendid man, Miss Nita, who'll love you 'most to death, an' make you marry him."

I stared at her, horrified.

"If it were anyone else who spoke to me about such things, I should say it was cruel," I reproached her. "You wouldn't be cruel to me on purpose, but——"

"Only to be kind, as the sayin' is, honey. It ain't cruel to wish for you what, if wise folks and books are right, is the best gift on this earth. Well, I

reckon, next to the love of the Lord, the love of the right man is the best thing there is for a woman."

I could not let her go on. It was like madness.

"Do you think," I broke in, "if I met a man— which I won't do—and adored him, and he me, that I'd marry him and not *tell*? Even if I were so selfish, so wicked, he'd find out soon."

"Well, and if he did?" Sarah gave me look for look with a new defiance which was strange on the pale face with its faded prettiness. "You're as much of a martyr, as if you was in Fox's book, with bags of gunpowder under your arms. Wouldn't a man—the right man—thank God for the chance to comfort you?"

I laughed then; I could not help it, though I hurt her, making her shrink visibly in her sensitiveness to ridicule.

"I don't know much about many men," I said, "but I'm sure that isn't what they like best to do for a woman. Besides, how can I tell that I didn't——"

"For the Lord's sake—for the Lord's sake!" she cried sharply, waving her thin hands up and down. "Don't you be keepin' *that* thought in your heart. You don't want me to talk o' dyin', or layin' down to rest, but that's the one quickest way there is to kill me."

"You make me say it. I *can't* tell——"

"You can—you can! Just you believe Sara I'm plumb certain!"

"But the dream——"

"Never mind the dream. It ain't comin' any more. I reckon we've climbed up to where there's realities now. *Teams go by contraries*. An' there's

no more reason why you shouldn't be happy than any other young lady that's beautiful an' full of life. See here, honey, let you an' me go to those gypsies that young fellow at Ronda was talkin' about. It would be real interestin', an' I reckon there's something strange about 'em, different from other folks—a sort of gift. I know where they live, an' how to get there. I was talkin' this morning to the guide from the hotel where we stayed. It was comin' home from the town, an' there was that gypsy king, as he calls himself, struttin' and posturin' like a peacock in his velvet jacket and red sash, and his silly white stockin's. He was pesterin' me to buy his photograph, when that guide come along and told him to let me alone. So I just asked the young man if there was any good in the gypsies, if they was nice to see, and if they could tell fortunes. He give 'em a fine name for that; an' everybody goes to visit the cave houses they live in, an' watch 'em dance."

"Where everybody goes, is the place for us to keep away from," I answered; but she looked so grieved that I repented. "Maybe everybody has gone now, though, and it would be safe."

"That's what I thought," she agreed, eagerly. "I'd like to see the caves an' the dancin' myself, for a kind of change. It's what a body comes abroad for, to get acquainted with the foreigneerin' ways."

"Well, then, we'll go," I promised her. "Will you engage the guide to take us, some night soon?—for I suppose we can't go alone?"

She looked relieved, but self-conscious.

"I have pretty near engaged him," she admitted, "for to-night, because he says night is the interest-

ing time. I've just set my heart on your havin' your fortune told by a real fortune-teller."

I thought—though I did not put my thought into words—that a "real fortune-teller" might have things to say which would make me sad to hear.

CHAPTER II

WE had dinner early, took off our few rings and simple jewellery, and met the guide, who had engaged a carriage for us, at a little after eight. The red of sunset still glowed in the west, and in the midst shone the half full-moon, like a silver vase in a furnace, as I saw it through my veil.

The guide, a wiry dark youth with bead-black eyes, who could speak a hotchpotch of English and French, sat perched on the high seat beside the driver. When we had passed beyond the groves of the Alhambra and its singing waters, and were going down the hill, he began throwing us guide-book information. I hardly listened, for to my surprise I found it exciting to come out of the garden and go for a drive, after having been shut up among the flowers and fountains of the Carmen de Santa Catalina for ten days. Down in the dusty white plain we saw the Alhambra standing up grandly on its green height above the town; and for awhile the carriage took us slowly through the narrow old streets into which I had looked from the miradors and terrace wall. They were picturesque because of their iron-grilled doors and windows, their queer glassed-in balconies, and flapping green blinds behind which powdered faces peeped out; but soon we left them

as our horses began to climb a steep and peculiarly ugly hill towards the gypsy quarter.

By this time the southern night, falling early and with suddenness even in summer, had painted the red west with streaks of purple, and the moonlight was gaining power. The low cottages and white-washed cave-dwellings of the gypsies which I had read about glimmered in the dusk like the inside of pearl-oyster shells, and the lamps behind their deep-set doorways sent out a dull glow of orange yellow. Big bunches of dusty cactus growing here and there leered at us like hares with pricked-up ears. At this hour the gypsy quarter looked a mysterious place; and the effect was heightened, as our carriage stopped before a cave-house, by a sudden rush of girls and children in fantastic dresses.

"I sent the *capitano de gitanos* notice we come," the guide announced, as he helped us out of the carriage. "All his peoples ready for dance, to make you a pleasure. You find it very naice. And you go in see this cave. It is clean, and not to be afraid of. These days the *gitanos* very good peoples, not like other times. No danger to hurt or rob."

It had not occurred to me that there could be danger, but now that he spoke, I was almost sorry to hear that there was no spice of it. The girls in their short pink and yellow dresses, their fringed shawls and tuft-like head-dresses, surged round Sarah and me, laughing, showing their white teeth, and chattering in Spanish. There were few who were pretty, but all were young and bright-eyed.

"They ask if you see dance first, or have the fortune-telling," the guide interpreted the chatter.

"Oh, I think we must save the fortune-telling for the last, don't you, Sarah?" I said.

She agreed, mildly. She was smiling, and looking about with interest. I was delighted that I had pleased her by consenting to her plan. Evidently she was enjoying the adventure, she who never gave herself amusements of any kind!

"Yes, it is better we do that," said the guide.

We went into the cave-house, through a doorway which was an aperture in the whitewashed rock, with a rough wooden door fitted into it. The cave itself formed two rock-rooms. From the outer one, which we entered from the road, I could see that there was another beyond, but it was in darkness, while the front room, used for a kitchen as well as for a dancing-saloon, was lighted by unshaded lamps with tin reflectors. The irregular roof and walls were whitewashed, and there were many utensils of polished copper hanging from nails. Also there were a few baskets, made of woven grasses, apparently gypsy work intended for sale. Everything was clean and meant for show. A fat old woman with a brown, greasy complexion, was flattered by our admiration of the copper pots and pans and ladles. She pointed out the queer oven where she did her cooking, and was so enchanted with Sarah's interest that she patted the London-made, black silk mantle caressingly, and fell to examining the bead fringe. At sight of this liberty and Sarah's amused smile, the young girls took courage, and the prettiest one, spurred on by her friends, with shrieks of impish laughter, tried to undo my veil.

"They wish no harm," the guide explained, as I shrank away. "They say, they sure the young lady very beautiful. They want to look, and they dance better if they see her face and eyes."

I had the impulse to refuse, but decided that it

would be foolish. I knew there was no real reason why I need object to these gypsy girls staring as much as they liked at my unveiled face. I put up my hands and took out the pins myself. The folds of lace dropped, and I laughed in spite of myself at the girls' affected cries of admiration.

"They say, my lady, you have the eyes more splendid than the Spanish womens," the guide translated their exaggerated compliments, "and the skin like some magnolia flowers. They think my young lady must be princess; she has such an high air, yet is much *sympathique*."

"They are very kind," I said, "but now we have talked enough about myself, and we should like to see the dance."

"In one, two minute," promised the guide. "We wait for the *capitano*. He come when he dressed."

Rush-bottomed chairs were given us, and by the time we were settled, the captain of the gypsies appeared: a strapping fellow with a low forehead and two chins. His costume in honour of the dance was a velveteen coat, and a red sash dividing his fancy white shirt from common gray trousers. He bowed to us, sat down in a business-like way, and began to play on a guitar while the girls, two at a time, danced and postured, cracked their castanets and struck little tambourines. Their dancing was rather wild and graceful, and interesting because of the background: the whitened cave-walls on which the moving figures flung shadows like giant tarantula. The smoky, yellow lamplight that lit sparks in their glancing eyes and made their teeth sparkle; but as a performance it was nothing to Spanish dances I had watched in London music-halls, a thousand years ago, it seemed. Still, there was a

thrill in it, a hint of savagery, as in a band of young tigresses at play. One dance changed into another with guttural cries of pretended joy, snapping of castanets, beating and jingling of tambourines and a strumming undertone of the guitar.

At last music and dancing stopped abruptly, the girls laughing and breathing hard, all eyes on us. We clapped our hands, and the guide announced that we had now been given twenty-five pesetas' worth of amusement. If we cared to pay more, they would dance more. But Sarah and I, after consulting, asked him to intimate politely that though we had enjoyed the performance we had had enough.

"Then the fortune-telling can be done," said the guide. "Which of the ladies first?"

"Oh, I am not going to have mine told," cried Sarah. "I'm past fortunes. It's this young lady——"

But the idea of Sarah having her fortune told amused me. She had insisted that mine should be done. Now it was my turn to insist.

"No. You must go too," I laughed. "I won't, till after you've been. You must come back and let me hear what it's like."

Sarah gazed at me wistfully, but seeing that I was in the mood for mischief—a mood she must almost have forgotten—she got up resignedly and, following the guide with a moan of protest, disappeared through the dark doorway like a train entering a tunnel.

"Is the fortune-teller in that back room?" I asked the young man when he returned without Sarah.

"Yes, mademoiselle, the fortune-teller been waiting there."

"A gypsy woman?"

The guide began to play with a coin hanging from his silver watch-chain.

"Oh, the fortune-tellers, they all gypsies here. This a very good wan."

"But how can my friend understand what the gypsy says, if you don't stay there to translate?"

"The fortune-teller can spik French and leetle Englis."

In a few minutes Sarah came back, with an excited and puzzled air.

"What a short fortune!" I said, rising to take my turn in the dark room. "It ought to be half-price."

"Old folks have got only short fortunes," said Sarah. "But, honour bright, it was real queer. I don't know as I'd of made such a point o' your comin' to have yours told if I'd thought what 'twould be like. Not that there's anything bad. But maybe, if you feel as if you don't want to, you'd better not."

Her look and her words pricked my curiosity. I had not wished to have my "fortune" told, but now it would have been hard to persuade me to go without hearing what the gypsy had to say.

"I won't give it up, as I'm here," I answered. "I'm not afraid. You make me quite excited."

Sarah offered no more objections, though as I went into the inner cave I knew that she was looking after me anxiously. I wondered what the fortune-teller could have said to upset her, and determined to find out after we got home.

The guide went only as far as the door with me, calling out in French, "The young lady," like a footman who announces the name of a guest. I thought it odd that he should speak in French instead of his native Spanish to a gypsy, although he had mentioned that the fortune-teller knew the language.

After all, this back room of the cave was not quite dark, though it had appeared so when looking at the deep doorway from the lighted front room. On a shelf burned a floating wick in a saucer of oil, flickering as if in a breeze, though the cave was airless and seemed to have no ventilation except from the front of the house. Near the doorway were two large, very neat beds, made with plump bags of feathers, and covered with coarsely knitted lace counterpanes over Turkey red. The place was cool, with the peculiar coolness of a cellar. I could see no furniture except the beds, and two chairs put at the far end of the cave in a rough kind of alcove. In one, with its back turned towards the door, sat stooping a figure with head and shoulders covered with a shawl. It did not move, but as there was no one else in the room, and no way in or out except by the door at which I stood, I knew it must be the fortune-teller.

I groped my way towards the alcove, nearly catching my foot once or twice in a rug apparently made of all sorts of coloured rags.

"Shall I take this chair opposite you?" I asked, in French, as I hovered on the verge of the hollowed-out alcove, and still the gypsy had not turned her head.

"Yes, if you please," came a whisper in the same language. The deepness of the voice was peculiar.

I squeezed past her chair into the narrow alcove, and took the seat facing her. The little light there was fell on my face, but though I tried to see what the gypsy was like, I could not. The large shawl she wore over her head and stooping shoulders was pulled forward so that it hung down as far as her eyes, and narrowing at the cheeks was fastened at the point of the chin. What with this muffling of

the face and throat, and the fact that her back was turned to the room and its glow-worm light, I was unable to make out a single feature. I could not see even a gleam of the eye; and the effect on my nerves of being alone in the cave-room with this vague presence, was disturbing. I was ashamed of myself for falling a victim to the clap-trap arranged to impress me. Still, I could not help thinking this might be a skeleton wrapped in a shawl, and a skull grinning out of the shadow.

I had to remind myself how near Sarah was, and the guide from our old hotel, before I could make up my mind to sit down. But it was over in a minute. I did not think the fortune-teller would suspect that I had been silly enough to hesitate. Sitting so near the gypsy that my knees almost touched hers, I inquired in a matter-of-fact tone what I was to do next.

"Mustn't we have more light?" I asked in French. "You can't see the lines of my hand."

"It is not dark to me," the woman whispered. "Lay your hand palm upward in mine."

I did so, and felt my wrist supported by her hand, large and warm, with little pulses in it which to my imagination were like magnetised needles.

For a long minute we rested thus, and, my arm growing tired, I relaxed my muscles and let the full weight of my hand fall suddenly into the old woman's, to see what she would do; but the support did not give way. The large throbbing palm felt warm and strong under mine.

"Why don't you begin to tell me my fortune or my character?" I wanted to know. "I'm afraid I must hurry. It's getting late."

"I am thinking," she answered, still in the deep

whisper, which I thought a theatrical affectation. "I am thinking—about you."

"Please tell me, if I don't interrupt you too much," I said, "how it is you have learned to speak French?"

"I have been to France," she whispered, "and to other countries."

"Telling fortunes?"

"Perhaps. And seeking my own."

"A long time ago?"

"It is not yesterday, lady. But now your hand has begun to tell me things. Let me speak of them."

"In one minute. Do you know English? The guide said you did."

"I can understand, but I would rather not try to talk it. French is better."

"Very well. Go on. What does my hand tell you?"

"A great deal, lady. For one thing it tells that you are sensitive; that you have strong and deep feelings. You wonder about yourself. You do not always understand. You do not know yourself through and through. You sometimes misjudge your own actions and then you are unhappy. If you are ever unjust to anyone, it is to yourself. You are afraid of hurting others. You would not for the world do that, even in little things. You would rather suffer than others should. Am I right, so far?"

"I—don't know," I said.

"Ah, I told you, lady, that you did not truly know your own nature. You fear yourself. I read that in your eyes."

"But you can't see my eyes!"

"You think I can't?"

"It seems impossible," I answered, more doubtfully.

"Then I will prove to you that I can, by describing your eyes. They are very large, and dark, and long in shape, which gives them a sad look even when you are not sad. But when you are sad it is heartbreaking. You have thick black eyelashes, lady, long and straight, not curling at all; and the under lashes are almost as long as the upper ones, so that at the outer corners near where your hair droops they tangle together in a way that is disturbing to the men who look at you. There, lady, have I described your eyes? And your eyebrows, too, are long, sweep downward a little towards the temples, which look you have of something fatal—as you had been destined to know the deepest suffering of life. Yet that is not to say you are meant to be unhappy for ever. Now do you think I cannot see the darkness?"

"You are a strange woman!" I said.

"Yes. You are right. But no matter for that. It is you we are talking of. I will tell you something else about yourself, before I speak of what has happened in your past, or may be to come in your future. It is this: I see you as one of the few women in the world—one in ten there may be, or perhaps not so many—of whose love a man could not tire. You would never grow old for him. You would always be the most beautiful one. To think of you would send a thrill through his nerves whether you were near or far away. You would be for him a quenchless thirst, a fever in his blood. You would be his heart, the pulse of his life, and the breath that keeps his life in him. If you did not love the man it would be the same. From the first moment he saw you, and knew you were in the world with him, he could not forget. His torture

would be his joy. This is because you have a soul, and a heart. But it may be you have not found them yet. I said you did not know yourself. It seems to me, it may be that your soul and heart are asleep."

"What do you mean by asleep?" I asked. I could not help trembling a little.

"I do not mean," the gypsy said slowly, "that you have never suffered. I think you have suffered, too much for one who is young. What I mean is, perhaps you have never yet loved a man. Answer me, whether that is true, because it will be more easy to tell you other things."

"I don't see why I should tell you anything," I said. "If you can read my fate, you ought to find out for yourself. It is a very simple thing."

"Ah, if you think it a simple thing, there is my answer. You have not loved a man, though many must have loved you, whether you knew or not. But some day you will love. And loving will bring you happiness."

"Does love bring happiness?" I asked, trying to laugh.

"Such love as a man will give you, must bring happiness, because it is the best thing in the world. It will be for him to make you feel that. I see the man, and I think he will try."

"All the trying in the world would do him no good!" I broke out.

"You can't be sure. You think so, because perhaps you have known more sorrow than joy. That explains what I see in your face. You have lived too much alone. Am I right?"

"It's true, I have been very much alone." I could hear the bitterness in my own voice, and I half

despised myself for being hypnotised into answering the gypsy's questions, taking her so seriously that my hands were cold, and my heart beating fast.

"You have thought, maybe, that happiness would never come to you?"

"I haven't only thought it; I've been sure."

"Wait. I am going to tell of something I see, which has happened already, but is connected with your future."

"Don't!" I exclaimed. "I'd rather not hear it."

"It is nothing sad or painful. I see—a great mirror. It is very large—immense. The sky is reflected in it. It must be out of doors. But something moves under the surface. Then it is not a mirror of glass. It is water. I see you looking into it. You are kneeling on one knee, your hands clasped. A veil falls over your head, but does not hide your face. You bend down very low. You are thinking—sad thoughts. Your face is sad, but how beautiful! Another figure comes into the mirror—a man. He sees you. At first he thinks you cannot be so lovely, so wonderful as you seem. No woman could. But he comes nearer. The face in the mirror is sweeter than the face of any human woman, and sadder. It is like the face of a water spirit, in prison. He longs to set it free. He would give his life to do that, for he has fallen in love with the face. It is not a fancy. He *knows* it is the only face in the world for him, the one he has been waiting for. He will love it always."

I sprang up and snatched my hand away.

"Someone has paid you to say this!"

"I swear to you by my religion that no one has spoken to me of any such scene or paid me or even

told me to describe it. I see it with my own eyes as clearly as a picture, in the dark."

"It is all nonsense," I said, my mind in confusion. "It seems mysterious. But it isn't. There's some explanation."

"I have told you the truth."

"Well! I don't want to hear any more such truths—or anything else at all. There's no man like that——"

"There is. He has been looking for you since he saw your face."

"Please tell me what I owe you," I said. "I must go."

"Give the money to your guide, lady. He will settle with me."

"But how much?"

"Whatever you think the fortune worth."

"As a fortune it is worth nothing," I said, "because there's nothing in it, and it can never come to anything at all. You assure me you're speaking the truth; but if any man who has seen me has told you to arrange this scene—if you've somehow managed it through that guide—you may tell your employer that I am very angry. That I don't wish ever to see him. That I want no man in my life, and won't let one come into it. That it's not possible for him to meet me."

"I swear to you again, lady, I have no employer. And to a man who is worth calling a man there is no such word as impossible."

"Good-night," I said; "and I suppose I ought to thank you for quite an interesting quarter of an hour. You are a clever woman. You might have been an actress. Perhaps you have been. I will give the

guide twenty pesetas for you. Will you be satisfied with that, from my friend and myself?"

"It is too much," answered the fortune-teller. "Five pesetas each is enough."

"Very well," I said. "You are honest about that, anyhow. Good-night."

"Good-night," replied the whispering voice.

I pushed past the chair again, and went into the front room without looking back.

CHAPTER III

"WHAT did the gypsy woman tell you?" Sarah inquired as eagerly as a young girl, the moment we had got rid of the guide, and were in our own garden, relocking the gate upon the outside world.

"O, the usual thing I suppose they always tell," I answered vaguely. "Unhappiness in the past—happiness in the future. A man coming into my life."

"Nothing queer, to make you feel she could *read* things?"

"Nothing that couldn't be explained—in one way or another. What did she say to you?" I hoped that Sarah would be more frank with me than I with her.

"Oh, well, I reckon when you *think* of it, maybe 'twasn't anything so wonderful. But it did make me feel kind o' creepy at the time. Then says I to myself, when you was in, bein' done, 'I wouldn't put it past that hotel guide to ha' told the woman everything he could find out.' I expect they was in it together."

"Of course they were," I said. "The gypsy told me to give the money to the guide, who would settle with her. That meant the guide would take his commission and give the old woman the rest. She seemed very honest, asking only ten pesetas for us both, when

I offered twenty; but probably she was afraid I should find out afterwards what the price really was, if she accepted more."

"I reckon that must ha' bin it," said Sarah, thoughtfully, as we walked slowly along the path to the house door. "But she didn't seem just like an or'nary cheatin' gypsy fortune-teller, did she? There was something 'bout her—I hardly know what. Only I felt all of a *heap* afterwards, for a minute or two, till I'd kep' on tellin' myself I was right silly.

"What did she say to you?" I insisted, though I had no intention of giving Sarah any more definite information concerning my "fortune" than I had given. And I thought that she would like to avoid answering my questions.

"Well—it don't seem much now, lookin' back."

"Never mind. Do tell me what it was. I won't go indoors till you do."

Sarah laughed her rare laugh, which, seldom as I had heard it since I was a child, always struck me as being self-conscious, as if in her meekness and humility she felt that she ought to apologise for making even so small a noise in the world.

"I reckon that old gypsy woman plumb disliked me without seein' me, except in that dark little cubby-hole. I said, did she want to hold my hand? She kind of hesitated, then took it as if it was a mouse, an' dropped it quick. She made a sort of excuse, sayin' she'd been in the dark so long she could see my face real clear. She told me I'd worn myself out somehow or other by my feelin's, till I was no more than a bundle o' nerves, an' I had a look in my eyes as if I expected a sword to fall on my head any minute. Of course, she used different words from

them, an' that whisperin' voice seemed to go rustlin' through me, like as if somebody was rubbin' my skin with dried-up, dead leaves. That was about all. An' I suppose anyone with eyes in their heads could tell I was jumpy with my nerves. It was her *way*, an' that queer cave, an' her face covered up so it might ha' bin a skull——"

"You thought of that, too!" I exclaimed.

"Well, yes, I did, Miss Nita. I got to imaginin' I could see eyes like coals o' fire sparklin' in the blackness under that shawl o' hers. That very idea come into my head, an' I reckon it was why I wasn't so set as I had been on your goin' in to talk to the woman."

"Well, it was an adventure," I said. "And seeing the gypsy cave and the dancing was nice. You were quite right to want me to go, Sarah dear. It was a change for us. It has taken us out of the rut—or it would, if we could get into a 'rut' in this adorable garden."

"You don't feel yet as if you *was* in one?" she asked wistfully.

"No, indeed—thank Heaven!" I cried, with my eyes on the stars. "If I ever feel I am in a 'rut' here, and pine to go on somewhere else because I'm bored and want a change of scene, I shall know that it's a punishment for sin, that I'm doomed never to find peace or rest, but must alway from place to place like a ghost who has no home in this world."

"You never did anything to deserve punishment," Sarah said, with the obstinacy her manner always took on when I was tempted to break into some tirade against myself or fate. "It's a good sign, our gettin'

this garden you like so much. It looks as if things might be comin' our way. Why shouldn't you have a little happiness? It's high time! Maybe that gypsy was right about you. I feel in my bones she was."

"Let's go indoors," I said. "If we don't, we shall hate to, more and more every minute."

"My! Do you hate to go in, Miss Nita? That's the way I was feelin', but I didn't mean to say a word. Not that there's a thing to be afraid of, but I kind o' wish Marta was in the house to-night. It's that fortune-teller, whisperin' in her dark cave, that's made us both different from ourselves, that's all."

"Yes, that's all," I echoed, cheerfully.

We went in, put the subject of the gypsy out of our conversation, if not our minds, and talked of other things loudly and almost gaily. But afterwards, as I lay wide awake in bed the thought came back. It came promptly and quietly as if it had been waiting for the moment when I could give it all my attention. It seemed to belong to the beauty of the night, which was so sweet that it was sad. The moon had gone long ago, but the sky was as thickly crusted with stars as the walls of the Alhambra with arabesques. My window was wide open, uncurtained and unshuttered, so that the lovely silent things of the garden, the trees and the grass and flowers could talk to me in their language, all night till morning, without my missing a word they said, even in my sleep. I loved to feel that they were not barred away from me. I knew just how they were looking, the lilies and roses and moon-white magnolias, out there in the starlight which shone only on the surface of

the darkness, leaving the deep velvety shadows unfathomed, like bottomless wells.

What a place the garden was to be happy in, and for love to walk into! It did not seem right that a woman to whom love was forbidden should live there.

Again and again I went over in my mind the scene in the gypsy house. I could remember every word the fortune-teller had said, and what I had answered. How could she have found out about the man in the Patio de la Alberca? It seemed to me that there was only one explanation. The man had remembered my face in the water-mirror, as I had remembered his. He had made up his mind to attract my attention in some way, and meet me if he could. I did not like this theory, for it cheapened my romance that the hero of it should bribe a hotel guide and a gypsy. I had not had time to realise this at first, but I saw now, in the stillness of the night, how almost repulsive it was that the man should have coached the fortune-teller to describe our meeting—if it could be called a meeting—and to tell me that he had fallen in love with my face seen in the water. I had to admit that it would not displease me to know he remembered, or even that he thought himself in love with me, as with a dream-woman; but it spoiled everything that he should have talked with the gypsy. It was as if he wanted an adventure.

I could piece together the little separate bits of the puzzle very easily; so easily, I thought, that even the glamour of mystery faded.

I knew now, and had known ever since I looked out of my window to see him on the restaurant balcony, that the man of the mirror had been staying in the same hotel with me. I had believed, though I could

not be sure, that he was the owner of the leather portmanteau. This might or might not be true; but if Captain Shannon had gone away he might have come back. Our moving so soon and quietly to the Carmen de Santa Catalina had prevented our meeting at the hotel. Since then I had never been outside the garden, so, if he had searched for me—perhaps at the Alhambra as well as in the hotel—he must almost have given up hope of going on with his adventure. Very likely he had looked in the visitors' book, if he cared to take a little trouble. The manager might have described the latest arrival. The description of my veil and travelling dress would have told him that I must be the "Miss Nelson" or the "Mrs. Lippincott" who had taken the Carmen de Santa Catalina. Probably he supposed me to be Miss Nelson. Next, he had wondered how he could bring himself to my notice, as I never showed myself anywhere. Then the idea of the gypsy fortune-teller had occurred to him, and he had got hold of her through the guide. I had called the gypsy honest because she refused twenty pesetas and took ten; but no doubt she had received something worth while from her employer. And poor Sarah had been beguiled by the guide who, now I remembered it, had even suggested the time for our visit to the gypsy quarter. The more I thought the more indignant I grew, and—disappointed. I had hidden in my mind a delicate idyll as a souvenir of my first day in the Alhambra, and nothing would have induced me to speak of it, even to Sarah. But he—the man whose eyes I held mine in the mirror—he had had no scruples. Really, he had been far more to me than I to him, though he wanted me to think he had fallen in love. He must

have a poor opinion of women. I had been right, indeed, in not wishing to see his real face. Now he betrayed himself as being made of very poor clay, and I was sorry—sorry, because the picture was ruined. In my mind I shattered it by breaking the crystal.

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CHAPTER IV

THE next morning Sarah was not well. After she had tried to get up as usual, she had an attack of faintness and was obliged to lie down again. With difficulty I persuaded her to stay in bed, letting Marta do the work; and though she fretted at first, later she enjoyed the unknown luxury of a rest-cure. Propped high in the narrow bed, her thin hair neat, and a large old-fashioned flower-mosaic brooch at the throat of her plain nightgown, she lay reading verses in "The Changed Cross," one of her dozen favourite books. I put a small table near the bed, with a vase of moss-roses on it and a jug of cold tea, flavoured with lemon, of which she was fond. There was room on the table for other things, but, according to a habit I remembered since childhood, when Sarah Nicholls was my nurse, she preferred to stow a strange collection of objects under her pillow. When she twisted about, all sorts of odds and ends slid from their hiding-place, like insects scuttling from beneath an overturned stone: an old silver watch; a handkerchief; a box of wax matches; a box of cough-drops; a black Bible; and a tiny bottle of amyl, a heart tonic.

She read, or let me read to her, until luncheon time. After she had eaten, very sparingly according to her custom, she thought that she would try to make up for her bad night by dozing for an hour or two. But

at four o'clock I tiptoed to the half-open door and peeped in, to find her still asleep. She had slipped lower down in bed and looked very peaceful, though older than when awake. She had the air, I thought, of one who would sleep for a long time, and as I was sure she had lain awake nearly all night, I decided not to risk disturbing her by coming in again till six or seven o'clock. There was still plenty of cold tea in her jug, and biscuits on a plate, if she should rouse and want anything meanwhile.

The house was so quiet that my light footsteps, rattling along the tiles of the corridors, seemed loud, for it was a fête day in the church, and Marta as well as Pepé had asked my permission to go out. I had not told Sarah of this, for if she had known that I was left alone to prepare our simple dinner she would have insisted on getting up. Pepé had displayed to me a poster with red letters on yellow paper, advertising a great "corrida" or bull-fight for the afternoon, a grand event for Granada in the summer. He seemed surprised, even grieved, when I shook my head, showing disgust; but when he understood that it was for myself, not for him, I had this unnatural prejudice, he brightened. Marta had been dumb on the subject of the bull-fight, but I had seen her and Pepé talking together excitedly, and I was certain that she was going. He vanished from the garden before noon, leaving Marta to lock the gate; and when I finished my solitary luncheon she too had disappeared.

Knowing that Sarah was resting, and would be better alone, I enjoyed the thought of having the garden entirely to myself. I liked Pepé, and it was comforting in the morning to see him pottering about, but sometimes I grew a little tired of him in the afternoon. He seemed to make unnecessary errands in my

direction, when I was reading, or when I wished to sit on the stone seat by the fountain I loved best, and dream as happier women dream.

When I left Sarah asleep I went straight to that fountain, with my Browning, whom I was beginning to read again with something of the old enchantment. It was the fountain most distant from the house and gate, almost at the end of the garden, and not far from one of the miradors that rose from the low front wall. The reason I liked this fountain better than the others was because of the arbour built over it: a large round arbour with a domed roof like a pagoda, so thickly covered with grape-vines and honeysuckle that it was cool by day, with a fragrant, green coolness, and mysterious in the evening, like an out-of-doors house, which shut away the night. Now, in June, the grapes were but tiny clusters, emerald brooches and pendants; and sprays of honeysuckle had contrived to push themselves through the masses of leaves to twine among the little, thick-growing grapes.

This afternoon the sun was intensely hot in the garden and drew out all its sweetness, like burning lips sucking wine from a wide-mouthed cup. The paths seemed paved with gold; but it was exquisite in the arbour. I pretended that I was a Moorish princess of old days. I had brought out several red cushions from the house, and on the old, lichened stone seat, under a canopy of green, the scarlet colour and my white dress pleased my eyes. The perfume of the honeysuckle, the faintly bitter smell of the hot young grapes, and the heavy sweetness of magnolias outside the arbour made me drowsy. I tried to read "The Last Duchess," but could not concentrate my mind. I thought that I might as well sleep for a while, perhaps till five o'clock,

when the sound of the fountain and the waters of the garden beginning to flow would wake me. According to the old Moorish custom the springs of the Alhambra are given to the different gardens for a certain time each day. Ours came at five, and went on until ten, in the summer.

I arranged my cushions, and composed myself for a nap, for I too had slept badly in the night, though I had not told Sarah.

By and bye it seemed to me that I had waked up, and strolled out of the garden to the palace of the Alhambra, for the first time since the day we arrived in Granada. I stood for a while in the Patio de la Alberca, looking down into the green water, where the tower and the gallery roof and the pillars were mirrored. I was afraid that something else might come into the picture, and yet if it did not come I knew I should be disappointed. Suddenly a figure moved under the archway; but at the same instant, though there was no wind, the surface of the pond was ruffled, so that I could see nothing. "The Alhambra is spoiled for me. I can never go there again, so long as that man stays!" I heard myself saying.

Then, a very soft, silky thing touched my hand, and I really did wake, starting up from the cushions. The soft thing that had touched me was the head of a white dog, tall and slender and feathery. His face had been on a level with mine as I lay on the seat, and he seemed surprised to see me leap up so abruptly. He shrank back, but finding that I did not mean to drive him away, and meeting my eyes with his soft gaze, he sidled towards me again.

I could hardly believe that I was awake after all.

"I'm dreaming you," I said to him. "You can't possibly be here."

His plume of a tail waved to and fro, and I made the dream last longer by patting his head. I had never seen any dog quite like this, even in a picture. It was nonsense that he should appear so real, for there was no way in which a dog could have got into the garden. The wall was twice too high for him to have jumped, no matter how agile he might be, and the gate was always locked. Pepé had a key, and we had got a duplicate made for Marta, as it was inconvenient for her to be without one. The third key Sarah and I were to use between us, though I had never wanted it yet. I knew where it was at this moment, and could see it in my mind's eye, hanging from a nail behind the front door of the house.

The dog was of a lordly chivalry which pretended gratitude for my caresses. He laid his head on my knee, looking up at my face with brown eyes that had half-moons of bluish white at their corners. He seemed to say, "As much of this as pleases you."

Stroking him, I saw the silver gleam of a collar under a silver ruffle of well-kept hair. There was a name engraved on the plate, and something else below, in smaller letters, probably the name and address of the dog's owner. I was beginning to spout, upside down, a word which I thought would prove to be "Gelert," when I heard a footstep. I looked up, and saw in the path just outside my arbour the man of the mirror.

Our eyes met as they had met in the reflection. He stopped instantly, taking off his hat—the rather shabby Panama I had noticed in the water-picture. I half rose, then sat down again quickly. I knew that the blood was rushing up to my face. I could

feel it tingling in my cheeks and in the tips of my ears. I was angry, and confused, and astonished, all at once; angry with myself for growing red, and angry with him for getting into my garden. But under the anger there was another feeling which I knew was there, though I did not wish to know, or to understand, or even believe it existed. Something in me, in some obscure corner of my soul, was singing. Something was almost savagely happy and satisfied. Something was clapping its hands in a kind of triumph, then holding them out in welcome to this man; in defiance of the self I knew best. To punish that something which was myself yet not myself, and to show it that it could not control me, I determined to be cold and even rude. The man deserved punishment for coming here, and he must know how much he deserved it. If I were not rude he would think I was pleased with everything he had done, and that I had wanted him to come.

"You did want him to come!" something insisted. "You want him to stay here with you now. You will be sorry after you've sent him away."

I would not listen to that voice; but before I had time to throw my sharp little javelin, "Don't you know this is a private garden? No one has any right to come here!" a thought flung itself in front of the words, as a woman might fling herself between two duellists. "Suppose, after all, that the gypsy told the truth? Suppose she really saw the vision, by reading your mind; such things can be. Then this man would not be to blame. He would know nothing about her, or what she told you, and he would not deserve to be roughly treated. He would be surprised and hurt, and think you a rude woman."

Maybe it was the same inner voice which said this,

in a different tone, trying to be subtle and conquer me in that way. I knew it might be so, but I couldn't resist the argument. Instead of speaking I sat looking at the man, while the dog bounded to him, wagging a feathery tail. And all my thoughts for and against him had passed through my head while I might have counted three.

"Forgive me!" he said; and somehow I was glad it had not been, "I beg your pardon!" for I have always disliked that expression and associated it with ill at ease, underbred people. "I came to find my dog. Your gate was open, and he ran in——"

"Our gate open!" I exclaimed. "That's very strange. It's always kept locked."

Suddenly I remembered that Marta had gone out after Pepé. She seldom had to lock the gate. Excited as she was about the fête and the bull-fight, she must have forgotten. Perhaps some friend had been waiting for her outside, and between them they had left the gate ajar. It must have been so, since the dog had got in.

The man echoed the thought in my mind.

"I suppose your servants were thinking more about the bull-fight than anything else. I hope my dog didn't frighten you?"

He spoke in a pleasant, commonplace way, in a charming voice, not looking at me too earnestly or intently, or doing anything to make me self-conscious.

"No," I answered. "But it waked me up. I really believed at first I must have dreamed the dog. It didn't occur to me that the gate could be open. It never has been before."

"I know," said the man, smiling. "I've been in Granada a long time—nearly a month—and the gate has always been shut and locked. I tried it once when

I first came, I wanted so much to see what kind of garden there was on the other side. It looked mysterious—the old cedarwood gate in the high wall, with frills of flowers on top—like things in pictures and stories, you know, that you loved when you were a little boy."

At this a smile would come.

"Yes, I do know," I said, "though unfortunately I never was a little boy. I felt like that when I first saw the gate—so we took the house and garden."

"I envy you," said the man. "No, I don't though! I'm glad you've got the place."

His smile and his voice won me though I was trying to steel myself against him. It was the mellow, warm kind of voice, I thought, that would make a blind person conscious of joy as if he felt steal through his veins sunshine he could not see. I was almost sure, in hearing him speak, that the man must be Captain Shannon, my next door neighbour at the hotel, because of the whistling and singing I had never been able to put out of my memory. I waked up sometimes in the night thinking of it and—yes, wishing to hear it.

Now I was hearing it; and his face, seen so near and in bright sunlight, was not a disappointment as I had told myself it would be, after the picture in the water. It was brave and fine, and stronger than I had thought it. His eyes were the bluest eyes I ever saw, or else the black hair and brows made them seem bluer than they really were. They had a clear, straight look, as of one who does not lie or do anything that is mean or underhand. He brought into my garden the one good thing that had been missing—the joy of life. He was not smiling, but I thought that his eyes could be merry, and that he would enjoy a joke, and have a

sense of humour. He might enjoy adventures too, but he had the look of a man too proud for such an adventure as I had in my mind accused him of wanting. That he should be here in my garden was evidence that he had wanted it and was doing his best to succeed; but somehow I could not help believing his eyes instead. And it was nice of him to be glad I had the Carmen de Santa Catalina.

"Thank you," I answered. "That is good of you. I'm glad too—for myself and the friend I live with."

"It is rather good of me!" he said, laughing. "I think it shows I have an unselfish nature. Don't you feel I deserve, as a reward for not envying you, permission to see the garden?"

I hesitated.

"If you only knew how badly I've wanted to!" he went on. "I believe I've thought of the place and longed to get in at this gate every one of my twenty-six days at Granada!"

As he put it in this way, I could hardly refuse. Sarah and I had had the Carmen for only eleven days. He had been in Granada, according to his own account, twice as long. And he had a reassuring air of caring as much for the garden as for me.

"Of course, if you like, walk about and explore," I said, finding it easier every minute to speak in an ordinary tone, without self-consciousness. "There's a lovely view over the Vega from the terrace in front of the house. I am never tired of it."

"Is that why you don't come to the Alhambra?" he asked, suddenly.

I looked up at him, startled. He was still outside the arbour, but he had come nearer, and stood with a hand on the frame of the rustic archway.

I did not know what to answer, or whether to answer at all.

"I saw you there," he went on in a very quiet, grave tone, without waiting for me to speak. "It was just before closing time, in the Patio de la Alberca. I was on my way out. You were kneeling on one knee, looking into the water at the goldfish."

An odd trembling went through me. Still I did not speak. But I was asking myself the question: Did he know that the goldfish were not all I had been looking at? I felt confused and anxious. I wished that I were a better judge of character, and especially of men. I had an impression that the sort of man who would bribe a gypsy to tell a woman he loved her, and wanted to know her, would not frankly allude to that scene. If I could be sure whether I were right or wrong!

"I saw your face only in the water," he said, "but it was like a looking-glass. I knew if I should ever meet you again I should recognise you, no matter where. I didn't think then it would be in my garden of mystery."

"Is that what you call it?" I asked stiffly, in haste to seize the excuse of taking up another subject. I was half afraid he would cling to the first, but he did not. He let it go.

"Yes, from the day I saw the gate, and tried it. Even now I think it's a good name. It's like coming into a hidden world, here. I might have tumbled down the rabbit-hole."

I laughed.

"Perhaps you have. Though you won't have any interesting adventures exploring it, I'm afraid."

This was a hint for him to go and look at the view; but he did not take it. I ought to have been sorry, and was not.

"The whole thing is interesting," he said, and did not move.

For a moment we were silent; then I hurried to break a kind of spell which was falling upon me, as it had fallen in the Alhambra.

"Did you know that anyone had come to live in the Carmen?" I briskly asked.

"Yes, I knew two ladies had taken the place. They told me that at the hotel the evening I came back from the mountains. I went away late on the night of the day I saw you in the Alhambra, or rather early the next morning. It was an expedition into the Sierra Nevada I'd promised to make—to see a friend."

"A friend—living in the Sierras?"

"A shepherd—such a wonderful fellow! Spanish, of course. He's never been down out of the mountains, though he's over forty years old. A glorious philosopher—has thoughts like stars. You would like him."

"Should I? How can you tell? You don't know what I would like."

"Oh, yes, I do."

I frowned.

"Perhaps you think you know a great deal about women?"

"Heaven, no! I'm a fool about a lot of things, but not such an ass as to think I know women. Only—I wonder if you'll very much mind my saying it? When I saw your face in that big looking-glass at the Alhambra, I couldn't help feeling it was the face of a friend—that is, of someone I would give a great

deal to have for a friend; and—and *ought* to have. Are you angry?"

"You know best whether I should be angry or not," I answered, looking straight up into his eyes, "for you know exactly what you mean."

"Yes," he said, without hesitation, "I do know exactly what I mean, and so I know that there's no reason for you to be angry. I should be horribly sorry to do or say anything at which you'd have a right to be angry. You see, for eleven days I've been thinking about you and hoping the time might soon come when I should meet you; so I almost feel as if I knew you a little. Wanting to have people for your friends is going towards getting them. Whereas, you haven't thought or felt anything about me at all, till now—and I see by your face that I haven't gone about this in the right way, for I'm making you angry, even if you weren't before."

"I think I am—a little angry," I said, coldly. But my heart was beating fast. I did not want to be disappointed in him. It was ridiculous, but I felt I could hardly bear it now.

"Perhaps that's because—and it would be very natural—you may believe that wanting to meet you, I did something towards getting your garden gate to open. But if you think that, you misjudge me. It was an accident, even though I knew you lived here. Nearly every day since I first noticed the gate, I've walked past it. To-day I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw it open; but Gelert believed his. He shot in—and I followed. The only thing is—I'm not sorry, unless you're annoyed with us both. And, honestly, I think it would be unjust to feel annoyed."

"Then I won't," I said, giving him the faint smile his eyes were asking for. "You—and your beautiful

Gelert—are welcome to see our garden. It's beginning to be the best time of day now—except the early morning; for the fountains have come on, and the water is running round the flower-beds. Isn't it a heavenly sound? But I shall have to go in, because my friend is not well, and I must see if she is awake. She may be needing something. Stay in the garden as long as you like, but please shut the gate when you go out; and later I'll lock it."

I got up; and I was ashamed to realise the pleasure it gave me to see his blank look of chagrin. I wanted to laugh, and to have him laugh with me. Also I wanted him to beg that I would stay. Of course I should say it was impossible. But I felt somehow as if I had known him a long time. The garden had never seemed so beautiful, so poetic, and altogether enchanting as it seemed at that minute. I hated to go into the house and leave him. He made me, with his gay, kind manner, feel like a lonely child who has found a playmate.

"I'm sorry," he said. That was all. And there was nothing left for me to say in return but: "Good-bye. I hope you may enjoy the garden."

I came out of the arbour, and he stood a little aside to let me pass, but he was very near. The dog Gelert pushed a cool nose against my hand, and I could not resist lingering an instant to smooth the silky head. It is so dreadful and irrevocable to hurt a dog's feelings, since it is impossible ever to explain.

"You like dogs?" the man asked.

"I love them. A great many people are noble, no doubt, but *all* dogs are, I think."

"Yes, and Gelert's one of the noblest. I have several good friends, but he's the best of the lot—so far; till to-day."

"Gelert's a Welsh name, isn't it?" I said, still lingering, with the dog for an excuse. "There was a great dog-hero, Gelert, I remember. I cried over his story. I used to think, if I ever had a dog, I'd name him Gelert. But I was never allowed to have one."

"Not even now?"

"Oh, I could now," I said. "But I don't know how long we may be in one place. It's hard to travel with a dog."

"Gelert's travelled far and long with me. He came from Persia. I've had him from a puppy—jolly little beast he was. He ought to have a Persian name, oughtn't he? But I was like you, about Gelert. Only I made a vow—when I was ten or so. Some day, if I got a dog grand enough, he was to be Gelert. This boy comes after a humble procession of fox-terriers. He's been the first to grace the name. And, oh, I forgot—may I tell you mine? It's Hugh Shannon—Captain Shannon—as Irish a name as Gelert is Welsh. At least, the Shannon is. I don't know about Hugh—do you?"

I had begun to move away, ever so little; and this question might or might not be an attempt to keep me.

"No," I said, laughing. "I know nothing whatever about 'Hugh'! Good-bye again, to you and Gelert. You won't forget to shut the gate?"

"I won't forget anything!" he said. "But—am I never to come here again?"

"Of course not!" I answered promptly. "We don't know each other. And—I'm too busy—learning Spanish—to make new friends."

"This friend is made already. And I could teach you Spanish," he said.

"Thanks. You're very kind! But I've arranged to have a teacher of languages from Granada."

And now I was actually moving away from him, down the path towards the house.

"In the Alhambra, then, we shall meet!" he exclaimed, not daring to take a step after me. "Sometime you'll come there. I shall see you."

"I may not stir out of this garden for days," I said. "Perhaps you will have left Granada. Now, really, I must go to my friend."

I turned resolutely, and—my friend had come to me! Sarah, dressed as usual, looking neat and mild, was advancing from the house with a tea-tray in her hands. She walked with short steps, pointing her toes.

For a minute I suspected her of knowing something—of having contrived something—I hardly knew what. Then I remembered how, at the last minute, she had not wanted me to consult the fortune-teller after all, because she had been startled by what the woman had said. This proved that she was not in any plot concerning the gypsy. Dear, dear Sarah! If I could not trust her, I could not trust myself—or even heaven. But I did trust her, utterly.

"Oh, what made you get up!" I reproached her. "You promised to rest all day."

"Not *all* day," she contradicted me, with her meek obstinacy. "I said all the morning. Such a lovely dog came into my room as I was wakin' up. He didn't wake me—oh, no, I was awake already. But when I saw him I knew you'd got company, Miss Nita, so I just slipped out of bed and dressed myself. I was right well rested, and it's done me good to come out. I was that curious about the dog, I felt plumb crazy to see him again. Here he is, the

beauty! And this gentleman. I suppose the dog's yours, sir? I've brought tea for two, Miss Nita, reckoning you'd got a visitor."

"Captain Shannon is here by accident," I said, looking at her meaningly. "I let Marta go out. She must have left the gate open. I'm afraid we shall have to scold her! The dog ran in, and Captain Shannon followed to get him back. They're just going."

"Why, Miss Nita!" exclaimed Sarah, ignoring my look, which she must have understood. "You ain't a real proper Southerner if you turn a stranger away from your door when tea's ready, without so much as offerin' him a drop!" In her eagerness, her excitement, she talked almost like a Southern darkey.

"Miss Nelson doesn't dare offer me tea," said Captain Shannon, with laughing impudence, "because she knows, if she did, I'd accept."

Sarah looked suddenly so puzzled, turning her eyes from him to me, that I should have absolved her from any secret knowledge, even if I hadn't done so already.

"My friend is Miss Nelson," I explained coolly. "I am Mrs. Lippincott."

"Oh!" His face changed, in frank disappointment, like a boy's. He looked young, and rather unhappy. The gay impudence died out of his blue eyes. "Forgive me. I thought—and she called you 'Miss Nita.'"

"That's our Southern way," I said. "We're both Southerners."

"I guessed that, from your voices." He turned again to Sarah. "Will you invite me to tea, Miss Nelson? If you've made some for me, it does seem a pity to waste it, don't you think?"

"I sure do," said she, with unusual decision. "An' if it rested with me, I'd invite you mighty quick, Captin. Down where I was raised we never let folks go out of our doors without somethin' to eat or drink, if we could help it, and I can't forget the old ways. But it ain't for me to invite. Miss Nita's so mighty sweet to me, she calls me her 'friend,' though I'm real'y just nothin' more'n an old family servant. I was her nurse once, sir. Sc, you see, I haven't got any rights here."

"How dare you say that!" I cried out, half in love, half in anger. "You have every right—more right than I have."

"May she invite me, then?" asked Captain Shannon, slyly.

I should not have been human if I hadn't laughed.

"Yes, she may," I answered. "But you'll be her guest. And I'm not certain that I'll stay."

"I know!" he said. "You feel as if you'd been 'had.' But, of course, we won't stop, Gelert and I, if you're sure you don't want us."

"What, not want that lovely dog!" exclaimed Sarah.

At this Captain Shannon and I both burst out laughing, catching each other's eyes. It seemed very strange to me to laugh like that.

"I think you had both better stay to tea," I said.

"And you'll stay, too?"

"Yes, we'll have it in the arbour, where I always have mine. Why, Sarah, there are only two cups. I thought—where's yours?"

"I drank some of the cold tea when I got up," she said. "I couldn't take more now, thank you, Miss Nita. I want just to run in an' make you a junket for your dinner, before it's too late for it to get nice

an' cold an' set. The other day it wouldn't junk. 'Twas the first time in my life a junket turned on me."

Captain Shannon laughed again.

"I can see it turning on you," said he, "like a little cinnamon-coloured bull!"

He was too well pleased at the prospect of Sarah's departure; and I gave her a warning look.

"Please, let's have only fruit and not a junket to-night. Even if you don't care for tea, the air will do you good."

By this time Captain Shannon had taken the tray from her, and now I showed him where to put it, on the wide stone edge of the fountain's basin, which we used for a table when we had tea in the harbour. Sarah, resigning herself to the inevitable, filled the two cups, and handed them to Captain Shannon, that he might give one to me. There were thin, buttered slices of "salt-rising" bread which Sarah made herself, because she considered Spanish bread "fit only for poor white trash." There were also little drop-cakes, and preserved cherries, samples of her good Southern housekeeping; and Captain Shannon said that he had tasted nothing half so nice for years. His compliments pleased Sarah, who, if she were vain of anything, was vain of her cooking. I could see that she liked and admired him; and sitting humbly at the farthest end of the stone seat, where she resolutely isolated herself to play chaperon, she gazed at him with eager, almost stealthy interest when she was sure that his eyes were turned another way. As he looked mostly at me, she had plenty of opportunity to observe the only man who had come even as far as the threshold of our lives, for many years. Almost it seemed as if he did not wish to look at Sarah.

If, in talking, he glanced at her, he glanced quickly away again. It was not only that he preferred to look at me, which, without too much vanity, I might have found not unnatural. There was more than that in his avoidance. Yet I could not see how it was possible for Sarah's delicate, primly refined face of sweet middle-age to be distasteful to anyone. She had been kind to Captain Shannon. He had really wanted to stay to tea, and he owed his invitation entirely to her. He ought to be grateful, and perhaps he was. Maybe, I thought, I merely imagined that he turned his eyes from her whenever he could without discourtesy; for Sarah appeared to be far from noticing that she was not appreciated. Having reluctantly abandoned her plot to leave us alone together, she was making the best of her failure in quite a surprising manner. Though she had isolated herself she atoned for my taciturn mood by inducing Captain Shannon to talk. I sat quietly amused, fancying that I could read her like a book. All her simple guile was directed towards "showing off" the unexpected guest, enabling him to appear at his best, so that I might want to see him again, and have a new interest in my life. I was sure that her thoughts were already running far and fast into the future; that mentally she saw us in love with each other. It was bewildering that she could not realise how sad and fatal a thing it would be for me to care for a man, and how, instead of bringing me happiness, it would plunge me into misery. Surely she had never read "Maud," and cried out with those prim, pretty old lips, "What matter if I go mad, so I have had my day?" Tennyson was not among the E. P. Roe novels and "Stepping Heavenward" and "The Changed Cross" on her beloved

bookshelf. Yet some such thought—the wild joy of having *lived*, even to suffer all that is possible for the human heart to suffer—seemed the only rational explanation of Sarah's confessed desire for me to "fall in love."

Drawn on by her, and perhaps as an excuse to prolong his visit, Captain Shannon told us a few things about his life which made me wish more passionately than I ever had, that I'd been born a man. How I envied him his experiences!

He came of an "army sort of Irish family," he said. They were nearly all soldiers from generation to generation. He was immensely proud of his father, who was a V.C. dead many years ago. No one was left now of his very own people, except his sister, or rather, a half-sister, for his mother was a widow with one daughter when she married his father. He himself had always been "keen on languages," especially languages of the East, and his father had encouraged him to learn them as a boy, thinking they might help him to "some sort of a career." Well—they had. Through them he had gained the great desire of his life: to "see a lot of the world, and to have things happen; not to be a sort of old stick-in-the-mud, living in a rut, like so many soldiers." He had been sent on a "jolly interesting mission to East Africa, because he knew some African dialects"; after that to Persia, as he had "got a grip on the language." Now he had lately come from away up the Nile. There he had fallen in for some "pretty good adventures," and at the end for a "pretty bad fever," just to balance things. It was indirectly on account of the fever that he was in Granada now. When he was well enough to travel, by easy stages, he had stopped a while to rest in Cairo,

and again in Alexandria; but as it was supposed to be an abnormally cold, wet summer in England, the doctors wouldn't let him go straight home. He'd been told to break the journey and get a bit used to a change of climate at "Gib.," or Algeciras; but he wanted to see the Alhambra, so he had taken things into his own hands, and had come to Granada instead.

"I meant to stop a fortnight or three weeks," he said, "but here I am still, and I don't know when I'm going to tear myself away. I've had some splendid trips in the mountains, picking up pals there. And I'm polishing my Spanish no end! I always liked the language. It's more manly and musical than Italian. I've been lucky enough to strike up a friendship with a clever chap in the Alhambra—sort of official interpreter there, quite a swell in his way—knows the place from A to Z, and has let me see all the hidden things and places, where the public aren't admitted. I can get you in, if you like. Would you?"

"Why, yes, thank you, we'd like it right well, if you'll be so kind," Sarah flung herself into the breach, when I hesitated.

For this he did give her a grateful look and word. He would be delighted to be our guide, whenever we wished. Couldn't we make up a plan to-day?

"Perhaps, if we meet you there, thanks, we may arrange something," I said evasively.

And I wanted him to understand that I meant to be evasive. It was much, much better so. Sarah was almost frightening me by her extreme politeness to the man. And yet, underneath the ruffled surface, down in the depths of me I knew it would now be a loss not to meet him, not to see him again. Already it had come to that.

He was willing to take what he could get, and did not urge me to decide anything there and then. Yet the dogged look of his mouth and chin when I coolly put him off, gave me the thrill that—I suppose—a man's strength is intended to give a woman. I knew somehow that his yielding the point did not mean giving it up, or that he was not keen on pressing it. I knew also that he would have his way. I might refuse to meet him; I might try to avoid him; yet we should see each other again. It might be that we should walk as far as the great barrier, beyond which we could not go together.

He was still talking of the Alhambra, while my thoughts had followed the ghosts of ourselves into the dimness past knowledge.

"On the night of the full moon," I heard him say. Evidently I had missed something, for his eyes were on me, expecting an answer.

"What is it, that's to happen then?" I asked. And my cheeks were hot.

He did not seem vexed that I had not listened.

"I am going to happen," he said, with a gleam in his blue eyes. "In the Alhambra, on the night of the full moon. The enchanted palace is mine from moon-rising to moon-setting, and I invite you and Miss Nelson to 'happen' with me. Will you? There'll be nobody else. I've been promised that."

"It's mighty kind of the Captain to ask us, ain't it, Miss Nita?" Sarah prompted me with a wistful look. "I'd like to go real well. I haven't been over to the Alhambra yet. Something kind o' told me to wait, an' I reckon this was *meant*. 'Twould be nice to see the place for the first time by moonlight, with no other folks there but just us."

"I fancy there are very few 'other folks' there at

any hour now," I said. "But of course it's kind of Captain Shannon to share his privilege. We must think it over a little, if he'll let us, and decide whether we can afford it."

Captain Shannon flushed very red, which made him look extremely young, and his eyes extremely blue.

"Afford it!" he repeated, horrified or angry. "There's no question of money. I've invited you to be my guests."

"Oh, but we couldn't accept the invitation in *that* way," I said, knowing that I was exasperating, and rejoicing obscurely in my power over the man. I wished to tantalise him, and when I saw his face grow red, and his eyes flash, I could have laughed. Yet I did not want to laugh at him, but with him. I wanted to torture him first, and then suddenly to see his face light up with unexpected pleasure given by me. I thought of his name, Hugh, and liked it, feeling a kind of tenderness for it, because it suited him particularly well. I wondered if there was anyone in the world who called him Hughie? "Hughie—Hughie," I said twice over to myself; and then went on to explain aloud, judicially, that I knew from the guide-books the price of a moonlight visit to the Alhambra was two hundred pesetas. "If we go, we must pay two-thirds of the price," I insisted. "There's no use discussing anything else."

"Even though I have to pay for myself alone, just the same as if it were a party, and it would add to my pleasure so much to have you—and Miss Nelson!" he pleaded.

I was ruthless. No, we must pay, or we would not go. And in any case we should have to think it over before deciding.

Sarah had poured a saucerful of milk for Gelert,

and walked out of the summer-house to set the dish down in the middle of the path. She had taken one of the small cakes with her, and proceeded leisurely to break it into a number of pieces, which she put into the milk. The dog ate, more in the wish to be polite than because he wanted the food, and he took his time in eating, as if his master had said to him, "Good boy! Be as long as you can, please!"

I knew so well why Sarah had gone out! And I was ashamed, because of course Captain Shannon must know too. He was quick to take advantage of the chance she gave him.

"You are wrong about the two hundred pesetas," he said. "I don't believe it's as much. Anyhow, I can get the price reduced. You must do as you like about paying—only I shall hate it. But I should hate it a good deal worse for you not to go. I want you to see moonlight in the Alhambra. Think of it in the court of the pond—in that mirror. *Think of it!* Say you'll go. And say I may come here to see you again. Please say it—now."

"Why should I?" I was afraid that my voice shook a little.

"Because I want it so much."

"Answer me a question, then!" I said. "Did you—tell anyone—anyone at all—man or woman—about—seeing me in the Patio de la Alberca—that day?"

I looked him straight in the eyes, and he gave back my look without flinching.

"On my honour, I have told no one. Not a soul knows—but myself and you."

"Then—you may come here again, to see the garden—and us. And perhaps—we'll go with you to the Alhambra on the night of the full moon."

"Thank you. Thank you a thousand times!" he

said, somehow contriving to get hold of my hand, which he wrung rather than shook. "Then at last I will go away. I couldn't have gone till you'd made me that promise."

I found myself on my feet, looking after him as he went out of the summer-house. He bade Sarah good-bye, and walked briskly off, with Gelert loping after him. If only he had known how I longed to go with him to the gate!

I expected Sarah to burst into praises of the visitor, but she had singularly little to say about him. She seemed anxious to talk of other things, as if she were afraid of being scolded for her encouragement of a strange man, unless she could turn my attention quickly to something else. She said only that it had done her good to hear about a life so different from ours, and she felt quite cheered by having "company." Such a nice young gentleman, who was so merry in his ways! Then it struck her that it was almost time to be thinking of dinner. Would I let her go in alone and make something for a "surprise"? The poor soul no doubt hoped that I might forget her sins, in the excitement of a new pudding. Often she went back in her mind to the time when I was a child.

I would not let her do the work alone; but I made her go to bed early that night, and afterwards I sat in the arbour, listening to the trickle of the fountain, and watching the moon rain silver through the grape-vines, into the splashing water. I felt Captain Shannon near me there. I could see how his eyes would look in the moonlight. I could hear him singing under his breath, "Weep no more, my lady." He was closer to me than he had been in the afternoon when I had to harden myself against him. Almost, I

could hear his breath coming and going, and feel his hand touch mine.

I hated to go into the house, because I was leaving him behind in the garden. And I knew that when he went away from Granada, he would still be with me in the Carmen de Santa Catalina

CHAPTER V

AFTER Sarah told me that the Moffats had left Granada, I meant to go again to the Alhambra. I meant to go every day, and spend hours there; but the coming of Captain Shannon to our garden made me change my mind. I dared not let him see me in the palace, because he had told me how much time he spent there, and would perhaps think I expected to meet him. I dared not even walk in the long avenues of the Alhambra grove, lest I should pass him under the elms; yet for the first time my heart was not at peace in the garden. It opened the gate and went out, and my thoughts followed. I was restless, and my nerves jumped for every new sound; but it was not the restlessness which had been part of my old self. In Granada I had lost it; and now it had not come back. This was not the fretful ache I knew as well as I knew the monotonous beating of my heart. It was like the restlessness of sap in young trees when the spring is near. I had never felt it before, but I knew instinctively that it was what Sarah had wished for me: a new interest in life, youth calling to youth. I had thought my youth was dead without having lived; but it had only lain in a trance.

The next day in the garden I sat with a book which I could not read; and the magnolia trees and rose

bushes were no longer individual friends; they blended together as a screen, hiding the future that pressed close upon me. Something was coming near which I could almost see, and could not escape.

Captain Shannon did not call that day, though in the afternoon Sarah's wandering eyes betrayed that she expected him, and I caught myself listening for the jangle of the old bell by the gate. The rusty iron rod which had to be violently pulled, was almost hidden by the trails of convolvulus and ivy that hung over the wall; but I had discovered it, the day when Sarah and I first came to look at the house, and he could find it if he searched. No one had ever rung the bell since we entered into possession, for Marta or Sarah brought all our provisions; and perhaps no hand had jerked that rusty rod for years; yet I seemed to know exactly how the bell would sound, and I fancied often that I heard it begin to ring. But it was only fancy. The day passed as all the other days, except yesterday, had passed.

I was disappointed when evening came, and there was no more hope—or fear. Still, it was not dull disappointment. There was a tingle of excitement in it, as there is when a violin suddenly stops playing because a string has broken. The string can be mended, and the music will go on. It may not be the same. There is the doubt. But it may be even sweeter.

My heart, which had opened the gate and gone out, leaving the rest of me like an empty shell among the flowers, knew why my playmate had not come again. It said that he had hoped I would go to the Alhambra, that he had been there, waiting; that when he gave me up, he thought it wiser not to pay another visit so soon. It was not that he did not wish to come. He

was wishing to see me more even than I wished to see him. The reason why I felt him near me in the garden was because in heart he was there. He, too—the part of him that was not with me—was an empty shell.

How pleased Sarah would be, I thought, if she knew what wild, schoolgirl ideas were racing through my mind while I talked with her in the arbour, about a long cloak of white Shetland wool she was knitting for me. If our real thoughts—hers and mine—could cry out aloud and drown our spoken words, what a strange clamour there would be in the garden!

The day after that day, still I did not go out. The little far-down voice in me kept asking, "What will happen now?"

What did happen was that the gate bell jangled in the afternoon at half-past four, and sounded precisely as I had known it would. It was one of those strident bells which could not speak at all, except at the top of its dreadful voice; but its clamour made my heart bound.

Pepé was working—or dozing—near the gate, and unlocked it, doubtless in astonishment. I could imagine him opening it a little way, to peer out with his blinking eyes; then, at sight of a visitor who seemed to him desirable, wrinkling his nose with a lazy smile—the smile of a monk on a poster, who tastes one of his own *liqueurs*.

The visitor was Captain Shannon.

He had come, he explained, to tell us that the "price of the moonlight" in the Alhambra had been reduced by more than half. If we were determined to pay two-thirds of the sum, it would not be very formidable. Had he given us a long enough time for making up our minds, and would we put him out of his suspense by saying yes?

One side of me wanted to say no; but I said yes.

He did not stay long; yet the garden was different afterwards from what it had been before he came. Everything seemed to sparkle: the leaves, and the fountains; and there was a vital quality in the sunshine.

Sarah did not leave us once. She sat near, and timidly tried to win the affection of Gelert, who was unresponsive though not rude. But Hugh Shannon's eyes asked, "Are we friends?" and mine answered, "We are friends."

The morning after, I made Sarah go with me to the Alhambra, though she would have liked to excuse herself on the plea of waiting to see the palace first by moonlight. He met us there, and after walking through all the beautiful courts and rooms, we sat for a long time in the little inner garden of Lindaraja. When we walked through the Patio de la Alberca, I would not stop to look down at the water. Sarah was always with us, and though he talked to her, and was polite, I noticed still that he turned his eyes away from her quickly, whenever he could. This puzzled me very much, and even depressed me. I felt that I ought not to want him for a friend if he had taken some unreasonable dislike for one who was everything to me. "I must find out whether I imagine it or not," I said to myself. I decided that some time when I got a chance I would ask him a frank question.

The chance did not come until two days later, though only one day had passed, since he first strayed into the garden, on which we had not seen each other either there or in the Alhambra; and sometimes it had been both. Lately we all three took it for granted that he would ring the gate bell every afternoon, not later than half-past four.

Sarah was unwinding a skein of white wool for my garden-wrap when he arrived, and I was trying to teach her a little of the Spanish I had learned.

"Why don't you ask Captain Shannon to hold your skein for you?" I suggested.

As I said this I watched his face, and saw it change, ever so slightly, yet unmistakably, as I was afraid it would.

"Miss Nelson needn't ask. I'll help her with great pleasure," he answered promptly. "But I know a dodge better than holding the stuff on my hands. I invented it for my sister, who is always doing fancy work, or whatever you call it. You put the skein over the backs of two chairs, like this," and he proceeded to illustrate his idea with a couple of chairs Marta had brought out to the arbour because a high wind had blown water from the fountain on to the stone seat.

I felt the blood spring to my cheeks as if he had struck me. His plan was quite an ingenious one, and worked very well, but I knew that he had proposed it because he did not wish to sit knee to knee with Sarah, facing her closely while the wool was unwound.

She appeared to be grateful for his help, but I thought the faded pink in her cheeks was a little brighter than usual, and that when she glanced at him—as she often did, in an odd, fascinated, expectant way—her eyes looked wistful.

It was years since anything had roused my temper, which used to flame up hotly long ago if anyone I cared for intensely or disliked heartily offended me. Never could I be enraged with a person to whom I was indifferent. It must be one extreme or the other to wake me; but now a flame of fury swept through

my veins. It did not matter whether I liked Hugh Shannon too much, or hated him. At that moment I could not have told which it was, but it was all I could do not to let my anger break out against him. If I had spoken, I should have said something to regret later, so I sat silent until, when Sarah had finished winding her skein into a ball, she proposed going to the house to make tea.

As soon as she was out of sight I turned on Captain Shannon. The change in me must have surprised him, for his lips tightened as if he had to meet some sudden call upon his strength. An odd thought flashed through my brain: that he might have had such a look on his face out in Africa, when the enemy sprang on him and his men from behind an ambush. But I did not mind being the enemy. I even wished to use any power I might have to hurt him, because he was strong and had always been happy, while Sarah and I were weak and had known years of sadness and terror. I was trembling all over, but I controlled my voice to quietness.

"Why do you dislike my good Sarah, who is so kind to you?" I asked.

His whole personality was changed in a moment. The air of gaiety and abounding joy of life which characterised him was struck away. When he was happy he looked so young that sometimes I wondered if I were older than he. In laughing he threw his whole heart into it, and had an engaging boisterous way of flinging his head back a little, so that one saw the under part of his chin, which was whiter than the brown throat, and cleft in the middle. His eyes nearly shut, so that the black curlyashes stood out, and the upper and under ones drew close together, showing just a bright glint of blue.

He had been laughing like that at a trick of Gelert's just before Sarah went, and while my fury against him was rising. Now he looked five years older, his jaw square, his eyes large and grave. One of his hands was hidden behind Gelert's head. I saw the other clench itself nervously. It seemed a long time that I waited for his answer; then he said:

"What have I done to make you think I dislike Miss Nelson? I hope I haven't been rude?"

"You know very well you have not been rude!" I exclaimed. "I almost wish you had! It would be something to take hold of. You have been worse than rude. You have looked—as if you couldn't bear the sight of her. It—it makes me hate you!"

"I see it does," he said. "I'm sorry from the bottom of my heart."

"Sorry for what?"

"That I make you hate me. I'd a good deal rather be dead than be hated by you."

"Why are you so cruel, then?" I asked, my lips very dry.

"You know I would do anything sooner than be cruel to you, don't you—or to anyone you love? And it isn't true that I—dislike Miss Nelson."

"You look at her as if you couldn't bear to see her face—her sweet, kind face."

He blushed deeply. I could see the red blood mounting under the brown skin of his throat, and slowly up to his temples, where the veins swelled and beat with the rush of it.

"I am most frightfully sorry," he lamely repeated.

"I'm sorry, too," I said, "because I can't have a friend who—who is disloyal—just to Sarah."

"Unjust I may be, but I disloyalty implies treacher

your friend I asked to be, not Miss Nelson's," he defended himself.

"You are ungrateful!" I exclaimed. "She has liked and admired you, and she has been very kind—kinder than I have been."

"Yes, perhaps. But do you blame me because I can't feel to her as I do to you? Look at Gelert. He goes to you and lies down at your feet while you're forgetting his existence. Miss Nelson calls him and tries to tempt him with lumps of sugar, which he loves, yet he goes to her reluctantly, and only goes at all because he is a thorough gentleman and wouldn't hurt a lady's feelings. Why is that—can you explain?"

"No, I can't," I said, sullenly.

"Do you hate him because he is devoted to you and indifferent to Miss Nelson?"

"He knows no better. He can't discriminate."

"I can. That's why I lie at your feet and not at Miss Nelson's, though she is always kind to me and you are not."

"Yet you just denied that you disliked her!"

"I deny it again."

"What *do* you feel towards her? It's something that I should hate, I know."

"I—really, I can hardly tell what the feeling is. I hoped I was hiding it."

"Then you confess there's something in your mind against her!"

"In my mind? I'm not sure. I think it's in my instinct."

"If it is your instinct, it doesn't deserve the name!" I cried out. "Sarah is a saint—an angel."

"Very likely you're right," he admitted, almost humbly, though I had never seen him humble before,

except in fun. And he was far from being in fun now.

A new spurt of anger rose in my heart.

"Do speak out plainly," I exclaimed, "if you want me to have patience with you!"

"I do want you to have patience, and not hate me if you can help it," he said. "But I will speak out, if you insist. I *am* grateful to Miss Nelson, very grateful. She *has* been kind to me, and it's made me feel a brute. If you think I've offended her, I'll apologise most abjectly. All the same—I can't change what's in me. I don't dislike her—for myself. But I do dislike to know that she's so constantly near you. I can't get rid of the impression that there's something—terrible about her. It's in her eyes. Was she ever—out of her mind?"

I was so amazed that for a moment I forgot to be angry.

"Sarah out of her mind?" I gasped. "Good heavens, no! She's the sanest creature in the world. Nothing could shake her balance. If it could, she would have——" I stopped short, and bit my lip. "What—*what* can you find terrible about Sarah?"

"I can't put it into words, any more than I could the fear there is in a nightmare. It sounds nonsense when it's explained. But she has a way of looking at you—when you don't know her eyes are on you——"

"What a bad reader of faces you must be!" I said, scornfully. "Don't you know—can't you see that she looks at me as Gelert looks at you—in worship? And I don't deserve it. If I served her for fifty years I couldn't begin to deserve her wonderful devotion. Oh, it makes me *shudder* to hear you say there is something terrible about Sarah. It kills me! If

there is, it's all because of what her love for me has cost her; but no stranger could know that. It's heart-breaking to think anyone could feel a horror of Sarah because—I suppose it must be because of that, you feel so—her nervousness, and the wild look her poor eyes have sometimes.”

“They are very strange, and she is very strange,” he said. “It makes me anxious when I think of it. Of course she is devoted to you, and sincere and all that. But when it gets on my nerves at night I—I tell you I hate to have you living here with her alone.”

“Be silent!” I stammered, tears springing to my eyes. “Now I do hate you. Now I can’t forgive you. It is as if you’d struck her—she, who is so defenceless—so faithful. Oh, if I could only tell you the truth about her—the truth about *us two*! I can’t tell you that. It’s not possible, even for her sake, to justify her. But this much I will tell you: she saved my life, and more than my life. She has sacrificed her health, and her best years, and her money, for me. There is nothing she hasn’t done for me. She had a legacy which might have made her almost rich—a person who asks so little, who has such simple tastes. She has spent scarcely a penny of it on herself. Nearly all has gone for me. She calls herself my servant—and in a way she was, for she was my nurse when I was a child, then my mother’s maid, then my maid, when I grew up; yet she has been more to me—oh, a thousand, thousand times more—than my mother ever was or could have been. I believe she would have died for me over and over again, but she has done something better and a great deal more difficult. She’s lived for me, and for me only. She never thinks of herself at all—poor Sarah!

and you hate to have her live with me! Oh, go, Captain Shannon! Go now! You are no friend of mine!"

Tears poured over my face, and I covered it with my hands, to hide it from him.

"Can't you forgive me?" he asked.

I looked up, and dashed the tears away.

"Will you take it all back, and promise never to do Sarah such a cruel injustice again?"

"I can't promise that," he said, heavily. "Perhaps it is an injustice—I hope to God it is. But I can't help it."

Suddenly I had no longer any wish to cry. I felt icily cold to him, though I knew that it could not last.

"Then you must certainly never come here any more," I said. "Nothing, and no human being on earth, shall ever stand between Sarah and me. I couldn't bear to see you or speak to you after this."

"You are very cruel."

As he spoke, he rose. I saw that he was ready to take me at my word, and the pang that stabbed me to the heart brought a strange joy with it. At last it was my turn to make a sacrifice for Sarah. What a sacrifice it was I should only realise by and bye, when the fire in my heart had died down to ashes.

"You are far more cruel," I retorted.

He stood up very straight and rigid, like a soldier waiting to be shot.

"Then—this is to be the end of it all?" he said in a half whisper, his eyes seeming to draw the best there was of me slowly into himself, to keep for a memory.

"The end of it *all*!" I echoed, filling my voice with contempt. "There has been so little—nothing we can't easily forget."

"You are punishing me terribly. Well—come, Gelert."

He turned away, and walked quickly down the path towards the gate, as he had on the first day. But this time he did not look back.

CHAPTER VI

I DID not hear Sarah come into the harbour, for I had forgotten that she was due at any moment, and I was sobbing away my nervous excitement, with my head on my arms, on the back of the stone seat.

I started guiltily when I heard her cry, "Why, Miss Nita—why, my lamb, what's the matter?" I was ashamed and sorry to have her see me. I had given her so much sorrow, it was time I tried to heal the wounds, instead of making new ones, in that devoted heart.

"I got worked up into a stupid nervous fit," I excused myself, wiping my eyes with a damp handkerchief, and trying to smile at the pathetic figure, motionless with the big tea-tray, in the doorway of the harbour. "What a silly *idiot!* I haven't done anything so foolish as this for ages."

"The Captin's *gone!*" breathed Sarah, almost in a whisper, her eyes startled. She pronounced the word "Captin" with a thin, drawling emphasis on the last syllable. I had liked hearing her say it.

"Yes," I said, anger coming back in a gust. "He has gone, and he is never coming back. I sent him away."

Sarah turned very pale, and, hurrying into the harbour, set the tray quickly down with a slight crash

and tinkle of china, as if in another instant she might have dropped it.

"Mercy me, Miss Nita," she gasped, in the Southern darkey accent she unconsciously used when her agitation was greatest. "Mercy me. No wonder you're cryin', if you've done such a thing as that!"

"I'm not crying because I sent him away," I flashed out at her. "I'm glad I did it—very glad. I hate him! I never hated anyone in my life so much!"

My excitement seemed to have a calming effect on her. She placed the tea-tray more securely on the edge of the fountain basin, and changed the position of the cups and plates.

"Dearie me, honey," she said, gently. "This is just like old times when you were a little girl in the nursery. I do believe you've bin flyin' into one of your real old tantrums."

"Yes, I have," I admitted, and would have been glad to laugh at myself, but I could not. "I have been furious. I am still. Every flower in this garden looks bright red. There's no use pouring out tea for me. I couldn't touch anything. Drink some yourself, please. I've given myself a headache. But I don't care. And I am not sorry for anything I've done or said. I wish my tongue had been a sword!"

Sarah did not coax me to eat or drink, as she sometimes did if I refused. She pretended to sip her own tea, and crumble a piece of layer jelly-cake, which she had made in the morning especially for Captain Shannon. I imagined that she looked at it sadly.

"I shouldn't wonder a mite if you was sorry by an' bye," she ventured, "if you was mad with the Captin for something he did, maybe meanin' no harm. I'm plumb sure he couldn't ha' meant harm, because

he likes you so much, and it would hurt him mighty bad to lose you—for a friend."

"Well, he has lost me—and if he really cares enough to be sad, he deserves it," I said, in defiance of myself more than of her.

"Poor Captin!" Sarah murmured. "I'm as sorry for him as I can be."

"Maybe you wouldn't be so sorry if you could have heard what he said!" I broke out, and then regretted the impulse, lest she should suspect that she was somehow concerned in the quarrel. I did not intend to hurt her feelings by letting her know that.

She had poured out very little tea for herself, but now she drained the last drop slowly, holding the cup up before her face, which it almost hid, for the cup was unusually large: one of the ugliest we had, which she always selected for her own use.

At last she set it down in its saucer, and began to arrange some tea-leaves at the bottom in a pattern, by prodding them with her spoon.

"Honey," she began slowly, "I want you should tell me something. It's no good your tryin' to hide it, 'cause I'm mighty sharp in one or two ways, though I'm pretty poor in others. Was this trouble with the Captin—what you're blamin' him for—anything to do with *me*? Don't you go to say no, for I'm right sure it was. I feel it in my bones."

"Please don't ask me what it was about, or what he said," I answered, almost crossly. "It will make me as angry as ever again, just when you've been calming me down by being so good. I want to forget it."

"So you shall, dearie, by an' bye. That's just what I'd like best. But I want you should forget it in the

right way. You don't need to tell me what the Captin said, Miss Nita, because I seem to know most as well as if I'd heard every livin' thing that passed between you. Don't you s'pose I've seen—since the very fust day I come into this arbour and found him here? A woman *knows such things*—even a woman like me. It's sort of in the air. 'Twas the same with his dog."

"Oh, Sarah, you break my heart!" I exclaimed. "That anyone should try to be my friend—and hurt you! I ought to have sent him away before. But I wasn't sure. I——"

"Lord, honey, I was sure, from the minute he clapped his eyes on me—and took 'em away again as quick as he could. But do you think I *minded*? No, indeed, dearie. I've got more hoss sense. The only thing I was afraid of was that you might get to notice, and fly out at him. Then, to-day, I understood about that skein o' worsted. I seen how your eyes sent out sparks, but I couldn't say anything. *He* didn't see. It must ha' come on him like a shock to find out suddenly you was mad with him. I reckon now I oughtn't to ha' gone away. 'Twas real thoughtless. But I figured it out that the longer I stayed the worse it would get, for, without knowing it, he'd ha' kep' eggin' you on to be cross. So I just made myself scarce—and tea *had* to be got, anyhow. I prayed to the Lord—I did, honour bright, Miss Nita!—that you two would get talkin' about somethin' else, an' it would all blow over, like it has before when I've seen you a weeny bit riled up for my sake, the same way. I could just ha' sunk into my shoes, dearie, when I come back to find you cryin', an' the Captin gone. I could knock my head against the wall; I could, honest!"

"It would be more to the point to knock *his* head against the wall," I returned, bitterly.

"I reckon that's just about what you've gone an' done, honey. An' it ain't fair, anyways. He can't help his feelin's more than that lovely dog can, an' I don't bear one of 'em any more grudge for not likin' me than I do the other. You mustn't either, Miss Nita. You mustn't really, if you don't want me to be right down sick abed. Why, I like the Captin better for showin' straight out what he feels, an' not bein' sneaky about it, for all he's got so much to lose in goin' against you."

"I told him you were an angel, Sarah," I said, "and so you are. You ought to have a halo." I laughed a little. "You would look a darling in it."

She shrank, and shivered faintly in the nervous way I knew well. "Please don't, Miss Nita. It's 'most sacrilegious. I *respect* the Captin for how he feels about me. Don't folks talk about *aurums* or something? I reckon they're some kind o' halo, though maybe not very nice ones always. I was readin' about such things in a magazine once. It said we'd all got them, different colours accordin' to our characters, and sort o' like electricity. It sounded pretty queer, but if it's true, I reckon my one kind of joggles against the Captin's, without my meanin' it, and rubs him up the wrong way. His is all right, I can 'most see it. It's mighty fine, like a Victoria Cross, or a lot of decorations for brave things he's done. And he's got a heart that can be merry, and full o' deep down thoughts at the same time. I make out he's a real *man*, Miss Nita, an' it's goin' to hurt me worse than anything ever has—except one thing we don't speak about—if you throw him over because of me."

"You are *too* good, Sarah," I said. "How his ears would tingle to hear you! I couldn't have done anything but what I did, and now the episode is over. We shall forget all about it—and about him—soon."

She shook her head.

"We can't do that. I reckon you *know* we can't, dearie. And love's too fine to throw away for a trifle."

"Love!" I repeated. "There's no love in question."

"Why, now, Miss Nita, even his dog could see the Captin loves you."

"Then if he does, I'm glad, for it will punish him more for his injustice," I said, hardening my heart, which was beginning to lose its numbness, and to ache because he was gone, never to come again. I knew that I had been harsh, though it was true, what I had told Sarah: I did not see what else I could have done. "Please, please let's change the subject," I added quickly. "The thing is past. I think Captain Shannon will perhaps go away from Granada now. He said the other day that he'd stayed twice as long as he meant to—and it must be ages since he's seen the sister he talks of."

Meekly, Sarah subsided into silence at last. She poured herself out more tea, and drank it in little sips, though it had stood too long, and made her cough.

Neither of us spoke again of Captain Shannon that day; and I made only the vaguest reference to him when I said to Sarah at dinner (which I could not eat) that my headache was caused by my own bad temper—not by what she supposed.

I went to bed early, assuring her that a long sleep

would cure me; and Sarah brought me a decoction made of steeped orange leaves. It was an old remedy which she used to give me "down South," when I had set my nerves jangling in one of my baby fits of fury. I thanked her for it, and when I had drunk, turned my face to the wall, saying that now I should rest well. But it would have taken more than orange-leaf tea to give me peace that night.

CHAPTER VII

BEFORE Captain Shannon came, I had been contented with only my flowers. But now that he had gone, I knew that the happiness they gave me was only leading up to him. It was as if they had said, "We'll give you back your youth, and make you ready for love." Then I had shut the gate on love, when it knocked; and now I saw the garden dull and drab, as through a piece of smoked glass.

I thought of him constantly. There was an undertone of him in whatever I tried to do. My mind was like a shell washed up from the ocean, and remembrance of him was the voice of the sea always murmuring through it.

Three days passed, and I had heard nothing of him. He might be gone, for all I knew. In some moods I was sure that he had gone. In others, I told myself that he had not really cared enough to leave Granada because of me. He had all the world. Why should I be of importance in his life—I who had nothing, and was nothing? A hundred times I longed to call him back; yet if I had known he was waiting day and night outside the gate I would not have called him. In my wise moments I realised that, though I suffered now, the suffering was as nothing to what I must have endured if the hopeless

little idyll in the garden had lasted a few weeks or even a few days, longer. It was providential, really, that things had ended quickly and suddenly as they had.

The fourth day was the day of the full moon. I knew it by my Spanish calendar. If our friendship had been undisturbed, we should have gone with Captain Shannon to the Alhambra that night. He was to have dined with us, and Sarah had planned a little feast. The table was to have been placed on the terrace, not too far from the house for dishes to be hot. She had spoken of buying red silk candle shades which would look pretty with a decoration of crimson ramblers; and she had even hinted at the extravagance of an ice-cream freezer. She was longing to try her hand again, she said, at peach ice, and the captain was sure to love it, because, coming from the east where there was *no* cooking, he was like a boy about nice things to eat.

Of course, we were not to have any feast now; and I thought I should always feel a pang if Sarah ever again suggested an ice-cream freezer.

She went down to Granada in the morning, as she occasionally did. How she contrived to make herself understood in the shops I did not know, but she seemed to enjoy the expeditions, returning pink with excitement and with many parcels which she had somehow obtained. I asked her once how she made a shopkeeper understand that she wanted honey, and she said that was quite simple; she made a buzzing sound like a bee.

This morning she was gone a long time, although there was little to buy. When it was almost luncheon time, and she had not come home, I began to be anxious, turning over in my mind everything I could

think of which might possibly have happened to her.

Marta laid the table in the cool dining-room, and got ready our simple meal of eggs, goat's-milk cheese, and fruit. Would the señorita begin without the señora? she asked, for she and Pepé both persisted in mixing us up in this manner, though they had been told, until we were tired of telling, that it was the other way round. Now we left it alone, and answered to the names they chose to give us.

No, the señorita would not eat without the señora. She would wait. (If I could have put more heart into the lessons, I should have been quite proud of my progress in Spanish.) The señorita would go to the gate, and look out to see if the señora were coming.

Sarah had our key, and Pepé unlocked the gate for me, interested in my anxiety, and probably hoping, unconsciously, for the excitement of some accident.

"But there is the señora," said he, in an almost injured tone, "walking along as slowly as if it were nine o'clock instead of one, and she is with the English Capitano!"

Everything danced before my eyes for a second or two: the shady green background of trees; against it, moving leisurely, Sarah's neat black figure, Hugh Shannon carrying her parasol and an enormous parcel. As soon as I realised that they were not an optical illusion, I would have turned and rushed back into the garden; but it was too late. They were close upon me, and Pepé would have been too deliciously scandalised if I had run away.

Sarah called to me.

"It's all right, Miss Nita. The Captin and I have

bin talkin' things over, an' I'm just *goin'* to be friends with him, whether you are or not. So I don't see, as you quarrelled on my account, how you can stay mad with him if I'm not."

"Will you forgive me, for Miss Nelson's sake?" he asked, hanging back a little, with his great parcel. "If she's forgiven me, don't you think I've been punished enough? Look at me and see."

His eyes called to mine, as they had often called before, and my eyes were compelled to answer. It was true; he had changed in the few days since I had seen him. His eyes looked hollow and tired as if he had not slept, though he was smiling at me now. Even it seemed that he was thinner, and that the ruddiness was gone from under the brown of his tanned skin. If I had met him for the first time to-day I should have thought him older than I had thought before.

"Miss Nelson is what you said she was—a saint," he went on, when I did not speak. "I've confessed everything to her, and she has absolved me, even though our 'auras' don't fit, and maybe never will. Won't you let me come back on these terms?"

All the time, as he spoke, he smiled faintly; but when he asked this question, and still I stared at him without answering, the smile was struck from his face. His lips tightened, and his first deep flush faded into pallor. He looked as if he were suffering physical pain.

"Is it possible for one to care so much, and the other not at all?" he said, in a low voice.

Electricity ran through my nerves. Suddenly I

held out my hand to him, and, springing forward, he grasped it.

The groves and the garden were singing in the sunshine, "Friends again! Friends again!"

"I thought I'd better just buy the ice-cream freezer," said Sarah.

Afterwards I made her confess what she had done. Before going down to shop in Granada, she had walked into the Alhambra, in deliberate search of Captain Shannon. There she had found him, looking, as she expressed it, "so peaked, her heart just bled." She had been wondering what she should do; whether she could have the courage to march up to him and begin at once what we wanted to say; but, "like a soldier," he had come to her, and they had "had it out."

"He may not like me," she went on, "an' I don't know as he ever can; but he ain't my enemy, an' he thinks I've got some real good points. He's said his say to you about me, an' he don't need to say any more, for that's all there is in his head on that subject, I reckon. And he's paid me a right nice compliment, that's kind of set me up. He says he never come across any woman before who would like a man better for speakin' out his mind about her, an' forgive him just like one man to another. Nobody except you, Miss Nita, ever said anything to me I set such store on. I've got a mighty soft spot for that young man in my heart, an' I couldn't get a minute's peace knowin' he was eatin' out his heart because our door was shut in his face. I made up my mind, if I could help it, the thing wasn't goin' to be. An' as for his leaving Granada. I knew mighty well he hadn't. If I'd thought there

was any danger of that, I'd ha' gone to him before. But I felt as if 'twould be best to hang on a few days, till you'd kind o' simmered down. Now we ain't goin' to miss the moon in the Alhambra after all! An' I reckon you won't grudge me bein' happy?"

I wound my arms round the flat, frail waist, and kissed her cheek, which was cool and soft, like the flesh of a quite old person.

"How wonderful you are, Sarah!" I said. "All the same, I haven't forgiven Captain Shannon for not appreciating you, and I shan't forgive him until he's learned what you really are."

But she loosed my arms, gently.

"You know, Miss Nita," she reminded me, "I can't bear to hear you talk that way. I'm so unworthy."

We spread the feast on the terrace; and though I said I had not forgiven him, I could have kissed the dishes I laid with my own hands at his place, knowing he would touch them, that he would be in the garden again, that he would sit with us at our table, and eat our food.

Just once, while I was making up a *boutonnière* of orange blossoms to put on his napkin, a voice seemed suddenly to scream in my ear: "If he knew!" But I silenced it by answering quickly: "What harm for him to come here without knowing, and call himself for a little while my friend? Soon he will go home to his real friends, and I will fade in his memory, like one of these flowers, pressed in a book and keeping always something of its perfume."

Yet in my heart I knew very well that our friendship would not end in half sad, half sweet peaceful-

ness, like this. Now that he had come back we should both have to suffer. But I could silence the voice which said so, in order not to darken our "feast," and I was keyed to a pitch where I was willing to endure anything afterwards, just for the sake of this one night.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHY, Captain, you look like a real prince!" exclaimed Sarah, when he came to us on the terrace.

It was the first time I had seen him in evening dress. He looked very handsome, I thought, and seemed to belong to a world far from mine, which was bounded by a garden wall. I wondered how I had ever had the effrontery to be harsh with him, as if my place were far above him in power, and how he could have borne himself humbly as he had, in return. I had never thought much about other women in connection with him, but now, when—as Sarah said—I saw him looking so "like a prince," it seemed to me that a great many beautiful girls in his own world must be in love with him, or wanting to make him fall in love with them. Here, he talked always of us, or of impersonal things; of his thoughts about life and people, hardly ever of himself or of what he had done, except in a glancing way; but I could not help knowing that he must be a distinguished soldier. Perhaps this unassuming young man, who allowed himself to be snubbed by a woman standing outside life, was a hero in the eyes of his country people. He would probably be lionised when he went home, and made much of by pretty women, and invited to official sort of entertainments where he would have to appear wearing medals he

had won. He had never told me about any medals, but I was suddenly convinced that he had earned many honours of which he had not spoken. I felt jealous of England, and especially of the women there whom he knew, or would meet when he went back; but there was an almost tigerish satisfaction in the thought that for this hour he was mine if I chose to claim him, and that I could make him forget the existence of any other woman.

"I have brought peace offerings to you both," were the first words he said. "Don't scorn them, please! Don't dash my joy on this glorious night; maybe they're not very nice, but pretend they are. Gelert and I chose them. We did our best."

He had something white bundled up carelessly under his arm. Now he unrolled a creamy film of old Spanish lace, in the shape of a mantilla. In it he had wrapped a fan whose chased and gilded ivory sticks sparkled faintly in the dusk which rose from the Vega like blue gauze. An envelope dropped out of the parcel also, but he let that fall to the ground unnoticed. It lay on the pink tiles of the terrace, back uppermost, and I saw a crest, and a purple seal.

"Will you let me give you the mantilla?" he asked. "I so much want you to take it. And most awfully I want to see you in it to-night. Do wear it to the Alhambra—will you?"

I would not quite promise to accept the mantilla as a gift, but I promised to "think it over," and in any case to wear it that night. I tried it on at once, he and Sarah helping me to arrange it on my hair, and over the shoulders. The fan was for her, old and very beautiful, with the paintings on chicken skin that Spanish women value. Sarah made no difficulty

about accepting her gift. She seemed delighted with it, though she protested that it was too grand for her, and she must often lend it to me.

It was only as we were sitting down to dinner, with the red-shaded candles lighted, that Captain Shannon saw the letter he had dropped.

"Oh, I was wondering where that had disappeared to," he said, retrieving it from the floor. "I must have mixed it up with the mantilla somehow. It came, and I read it just before I started out from the hotel. A tirade from my half-sister, Lady Mendel, threatening to look me up if I don't come home soon," he laughed, and put the envelope in a breast pocket of his coat. As he did this, I had a glimpse of a strong, almost masculine handwriting, with very thick, upright black letters.

"Do you think she really will come, sir?" Sarah asked.

"Not she!" he replied, gaily. "She's in Paris. Granada in July wouldn't suit her book at all."

"It isn't July yet," I said, looking down over the blue Vega with its spangling lights.

"No, but it soon will be."

"Perhaps you will have taken her advice and gone home by that time," I suggested with an air of carelessness.

"I have very seldom taken her advice," said he, "though she thinks it's her duty to go on giving it; and I shall take it less than ever now. I say, Miss Nelson, did you make this cold consommé? It's gorgeous."

And we talked of other things.

The Alhambra might have been carved all of alabaster in the moonlight, with here and there a glow-

ing jewel. And we had it to ourselves : we three, and the interpreter, Captain Shannon's friend.

He could speak English, and Sarah began by asking him more or less intelligent questions, and hanging on his words, I very well knew why. He seemed flattered by her interest in what he could tell, and they fell behind us, as he explained to her the meaning of the horse-shoe windows, and small supporting pillars. "Tent poles and drapery they represented to that nation of tent dwellers," I heard him saying. Then his voice ceased. I looked back for the two figures in the shadow under the gallery, but they were out of sight.

"He will show her what they call the boudoir of Lindaraja," Captain Shannon said. "It's his favourite place. And by and bye he will take her into the Court of Lions, and tell her how Gautier once spent a night there, at the time of the full moon."

"Shan't we go with them?" I asked. "He seems very interesting."

"He is, but not half as interesting to you as I am, I hope. And I want you to be with me alone in the Court of Lions. I love the dear old beasts, don't you? —with their square teeth and different kinds of carved fur, and their wrinkled-up, obliterated faces that look as if they were brooding on their pasts. Now, by moonlight, if only we knew the right call, you and I could lure them all twelve from their places. First they would sit stealthily down, slip the fountain off their backs, and leap to us, still spouting crystal jets from their mouths. We could soon train them not to spout in the house, though; and they would follow us to Egypt, on shipboard and railway trains and everywhere."

"But I'm not going to Egypt," I laughed.

"That's where I hope to persuade you you're mistaken," he said, in a suddenly changed voice "I hope you are going there."

"Some day—a long time from now, maybe."

"No, soon. Stop here a moment, please. This is the exact spot where you were kneeling when I saw your face reflected in the pond. I know the very stone by heart—the stone where your knee rested."

He laid his hand on my arm, and made me stand still.

We were in the Patio de la Alberca, looking down in the water as we had looked then, only now we were together—for a little while; still, we were together, as I had never thought we could be in this place. And the full moon was rising above the high white walls of the court.

The water was not green, but silver, and deep indigo blue where the moon had not yet touched it. Our figures showed, floating far down under the surface, as if the pool were a deep azure sky sprinkled with stars, and we were spirits wandering in space. Standing side by side, we blended into one image.

"I made a vow here that day," he said, in a hushed voice. "I vowed that I'd leave no stone, precious or otherwise, unturned to get you. But before I ask you to be my wife, and to go to Egypt with me when I go, I have a confession to make——"

"Please stop!" I broke in. "I can't——"

"No, I won't stop. You shall not speak till you've heard me to the end. I didn't lie when I said that never to a soul had I mentioned meeting you here. But—I was the gypsy."

"You—the gypsy!"

"Yes. I've felt a brute. But I always meant to

confess—at this very place, when I could tell you here, in my own person, what I made the gypsy tell for me: that I love you with all there is of me, that I'll love you through eternity. That's my only excuse for what I did. The guide knew I'd been inquiring where Miss Nelson and Mrs. Lippincott had gone—for I guessed your name must be one of those two signed in the visitors' book, from the description of your dress and veil, and your beautiful tall figure. He told me he was engaged to take you both to the gypsy quarter that night, to see the dancing and hear your fortunes. Then the plan jumped into my mind—for I'd been there often, and I knew what the place was like. I knew I'd only to keep my head and whisper sepulchrally, and shroud myself with shawls, sitting humped up, with my back to what little light there'd be, to do the trick all right. But it *was* a trick. I didn't realise that it was a pretty low-down sort of thing to do till after it was done. The only excuse was, I simply *had* to make you think of me, somehow or other, till I could get to know you. I couldn't let time run on, and not even exist for you. You can't conceive what a blow it was, to find you'd left the hotel, when I got back from my mountain tramp. I'd promised my shepherd to come there and see him again, with some books and tobacco. I couldn't bear to fail a fellow of that kind, or I wouldn't have gone a step after seeing you. But the hotel people said the elder of those two ladies I asked about had engaged rooms for several days, so I believed if I hurried like mad, it would be all right. You were never out of my thoughts once, from the minute those wonderful eyes looked up at me out of this big mirror, till they looked at me again in your garden; and you never will be, now, till our eyes meet in some other world beyond

this. Then came the shock of losing you. God! it was a shock. When I got that chance to let you know by the gypsy, how I was loving you, sooner than I could possibly manage it any other way without kidnapping you—why, I just snatched it. You'll have to forgive me."

He seized my hands and crushed them against his breast. My fingers could feel his heart pounding, like a bird that beats its wings in a cage.

"I am always forgiving you!" I said breathlessly, as if I had been caught by a whirlwind.

"Then you do!"

"You say I must. So——"

"But you do, of your own accord?—because I love you so frightfully—ten thousand times more than at first, now I know you for what you are—my life eternal, my soul!"

"I forgive you! I can't help it," I said. "But you *don't* know me as I am. If you did, you wouldn't love me."

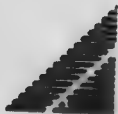
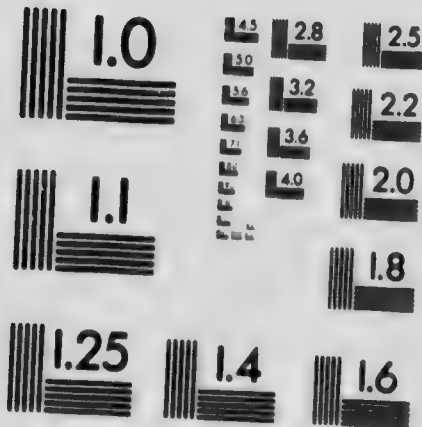
He kissed the palms of my hands.

"This at first," he said, "for my love of you. Your lips when I've made you love me. Not know you? Why, the instant our eyes met down there in the water, I knew I was seeing for the first time in my life a woman—the woman—related to my soul. Not love you, if I knew you as you are? Why, you can't help revealing yourself through your eyes—your blessed, beautiful eyes—and your dear, soft voice, as southern as these orange blossoms you gave me, and sweeter. I know you better than you know yourself. Can it be possible that you, who belonged to me always from the beginning of things, didn't recognise that we were meant for each other, the first day? I dare you to tell me you didn't?"



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"I thought of you afterwards," I said. "It was mysterious and romantic, like the face of a man coming into a crystal. But I don't suppose I should ever see you again. I didn't even want to."

"Why not?"

"Because—I was sure if I saw you I should be disappointed."

"That's just contrary to what I felt. I knew the real you would be more wonderful. But if you're disappointed——"

"I was mistaken, because—I'm *not* disappointed."

"My darling! Do you mean—that you care for me?"

"Not—not——" I stammered, holding myself off from him, "in the way you want."

But he would not let me go.

"Look me in the face," he said, "and tell me that again if you can."

I lifted my eyes, and looked at him. Chiselled by the moonlight and glorified by love, his face seemed to me supernatural'y beautiful. His eyes called my chilled soul out of the shadows and warmed it with divine fire.

"I can't say it," I whispered. "But, oh, I implore you, don't try to make me say anything else. Let us be happy. Let us be friends. It's the only way we can keep each other. I swear to you that's the truth. You don't understand."

"What don't I understand?" he asked more gently, but still holding me in his arms. "If you can't say you don't love me, that means you do. Yes, we'll be happy—good heavens, *how* happy! And we'll be friends. But above all we'll be lovers!"

"No," I said, "that can't be! We can't be anything to each other—unless you'll be my friend. Oh, how

I wish you could! It will be so hard to lose you, now."

He opened his arms and freed me; but when I would have moved a step away, he took my hands and drew me near to him again. So we stood, looking at each other, while his hands held mine down at my sides.

"We won't lose each other, never fear," he said. "But you'll have to tell me what you mean. Dearest—is there another man? Miss Nelson told me long ago that you—that you're free. I couldn't wait, when I heard you were Mrs. Lippincott; I asked her the second day I came to your garden. You haven't promised yourself to anyone else? Because if you have, you'll have to break the promise. You couldn't possibly keep it, for you belong to me."

"There's no other man," I said. "But—you spoke a little while ago about—asking me to be your wife. What I mean is—that I can't marry you—or anyone—ever. It isn't just some silly, woman's reason. There's a barrier between us as high as the wall of China, and it can't be climbed."

"If you think that, you don't know what a man will do when he loves a woman as I love you, Nita. Oh, the dear little name! I've called you that a hundred times to myself since I first heard it from Miss Nelson! If the wall were as high as the stars, and as thick as a mountain, and as slippery as glass, I'd climb it somehow, if it were the one way to get you. You've only to tell me what it is."

"Ah, that's just what I can't do!" I cried. "At least—I will not. If I told, it would be the same thing as sending you away forever, and I don't want to—oh, I don't want to do that yet, if I can help it."

"You're as mysterious and secret as a castle on a

rock with a deep moat round it!" he exclaimed, almost angrily. "I know that in the castle noble knights and lovely ladies live, but you seem to want me to think you're the stronghold of a robber horde."

In spite of myself I laughed, though tears were near. My heart seemed drowning in them, though my eyes were dry.

"That is what I am," I said, with the bitter laugh the picture called up. "A robber stronghold."

"Then I'll take it by assault!" he exclaimed.

"You'd find it dark and full of pitfalls, and not worth taking. Oh, if you'd believe me, and if you would be my friend! The part of the castle where you'd come as my friend, isn't quite uninhabitable, like the rest."

"Don't let's speak in parables to each other, my dearest one," he said. "And before we go any farther, let me assure you of this, once and for all; nothing you could tell me about yourself would make me believe the castle wasn't worth taking, and nothing could make me want less to take it than I do now—which is about one hundred thousand times more than I ever wanted, or will want, to do anything else in the world. Now that's understood, isn't it?"

"I love you for thinking so," I told him, "but—you simply don't know what you are talking about. For a minute you carried me off my feet, though even then I kept my senses just enough to realise that nothing—nothing can come of this but heartbreak for me—and for you, if you really care as you say. Unless——"

"Unless—what?"

"Only what I said before," I persisted. "Unless will be my friend, and let us take what happiness

we can find in each other's friendship. Perhaps I might let myself have that—though even so much, wouldn't be fair to you, really. Still, while you stay here—if you don't go at once——”

“I shall never go, till I take you with me, or your promise.”

“Ah, but that's nonsense! Think of your career——”

“You are my career.”

I tried very hard to draw my hands away from him, but he was too strong, and too determined.

“You are going to make me very unhappy!” I said, and my voice began to tremble. “You would be sorry to do that if you knew what a life I have had, and how—up to this—you've been the one bright spot in it since I was a little girl. If you would only be kind, and take what I can give—or else go away at once, you would still be to me like a bright ray of sunshine in a dark room. Your love would be so perfect a thing for me to remember that I wouldn't grudge one of the steps which has led me up to it. I should regret nothing, even though I had to suffer in future, because it seems to me that with such a memory, such suffering would be better than many women's happiness.”

He kept my hands, but his grasp, though as firm, was somehow different. It was as if the convulsiveness died out of it.

“Tell me exactly what you want me to do,” he said. “I can't promise to do it, because I'm only a man, not a marble saint, and I don't want to be one. But perhaps we'll agree on an armistice—to last till I can bring you to my way of thinking.”

“That will be never,” I sighed. “Still, I should be thankful to have the armistice, because—you're so

much to me. I didn't want to let you mean so much, but——"

"It was God did that—or fate, or whatever you like to call it."

"Very well," I agreed. "It has come into my life, without my wish, but now that it has come, I cling to what it can give me. If I can have anything at all without making you suffer too much."

"I don't care how much I suffer, so I win in the end," he said. "And even if I fail—but I won't fail! Tell me what you want me to do."

"Not to tear my heart out by asking me to marry you, or anything like that."

"By asking you to marry me, or anything like that. Very well. What else?"

"That's all—for the immediate present."

"Then—for the immediate present—I promise. But what do I get in return?"

"My—friendship, with all my heart."

"In all your heart, there's room for more than friendship. Do you give me your love?"

I was silent for an instant. Then I said, in a very little voice:

"If I tell you something, will you make me another promise? Not to do anything but just hold my hands, as you're holding them now, kindly, and like—like an affectionate friend?"

"If you imagine that I'm holding them now like an affectionate friend, you're most awfully mistaken. But never mind. Let it pass at that. I'll do nothing to-night that you ask me not to do. And sufficient for the night is the good thereof—since you won't of your free will grant me anything better—yet. Now, tell me the something. Is it that you love me?"

"Yes," I said, "but that isn't quite all. You are

good to me now—so good! And I'll tell you a little more. I loved you from the first minute, when I saw you here in the water. I didn't know it then, but I was afraid of it. I called you to myself 'the man in the mirror,' and I couldn't keep you out of my thoughts—day or night. I dreamed of you sometimes, and that did me good, for it was always a pleasant dream, and sent away a hateful one I used to have. After the gypsy——"

"Yes, dearest, after the gypsy? If you only *knew* how hard you're making it, though, to keep that arctic promise!"

"I was so afraid my dream of you was to be spoiled—that you'd done something I should hate to think of your doing. That's why I asked you, in the garden, whether you'd ever spoken of me to anyone."

"I understood. I guessed what was in your mind. It was a bad moment for me, because I was thoroughly ashamed of myself, and that's not a good feeling. I didn't lie; but still—I vowed then and there to make a clean breast of the whole business to-night."

"To-night? You planned *then*—to do that?"

"Yes, because I couldn't do it—owing to what the gypsy said about me, till the time came when I could tell you the same thing she told. I thought to-night would be the soonest I should dare to speak out, for fear of frightening you away like the fairy faun in the story. By Jove, it was all I could do, though, to keep myself bottled up till now! It seemed as if this night would never come. You see—you simply *had* to love me. I believed such love as mine must create love. It's like a forest fire in the wind. It had to set you on fire too, you beautiful, proud young pine-tree on a hill."

"Young!" I echoed. "There's another obstacle

—oh, but one of the little ones, small as a pebble compared to the rest. I'm afraid—horribly afraid I'm—older than you are. You—you look such a boy sometimes."

"Because I'm in love. Why, I must be a good ten years older than you are, you dark shadowy child—maybe more. I'm thirty-two."

"Oh, I'm thankful!" I exclaimed. "I should have hated to be older than you. But I'm not young. I'm twenty-nine. Next October I'll be thirty."

"An opal for our engagement-ring, then," he said. "That's not breaking my promise. October's a long way off—quite out of the 'immediate present.'"

We both laughed a little, and it was good to laugh with him. It seemed almost as if he had taught me to laugh. I had forgotten how, before he came.

"If only the other bugbears are no worse than this one!" he exclaimed.

"You must have no hope of that sort," I assured him quickly. "Tell me one thing, since I've forgiven you the gypsy. Why did you make her say she swore by her religion? It sounded so sincere, somehow, it forced me to believe her."

"And so it was sincere, for I meant my own religion; and that's a lot to me. It didn't come out of anything I ever read or heard, but just from—oh, well, listening to the beautiful things that speak without voices, and tell you how you're related to the universe. You know!"

"Yes, I know," I said. "Sometimes when I've been very unhappy, I've had no religion at all; but since I came to my garden here, it's been different. I thought it was the flowers who were teaching me, but now I know it was you—and love. Oh, whatever happens, and no matter how soon we part—it must

come sooner or later—when you remember me you can say to yourself: 'I brought her happiness and light she'd been starving for.' Among all the missions you've carried out, maybe that may count as one of your greatest successes."

For answer, he kissed both my hands again, very softly and gently. I told myself that when I went home I would kiss them where his lips had been.

"If the world has been cruel to you, it's a brute," he said. "It shall never get another chance to hurt you. I'll see to that, as your trusty knight. You were born to be a queen of hearts, and it's time you came into your own, instead of living like royalty in exile. Meanwhile, do what you choose with my heart. But before we arrange the terms of our friendship—for the 'immediate present'—I'm going to ask you a question I have no right to ask. It will keep your hand in, forgiving me. Have you ever—loved any man—much? I don't suppose for a minute you'll answer."

"Oh, but I will!" I said, rejoiced there was something I could tell which would make him glad. "I loved any man—ever, till now. And not boy since I was fourteen."

You adorable darling! Bless you, I knew it, somehow. There's something about you that told me. And I've been so disgustingly jealous of your—of Lippincott, sometimes. Then again I had a really weird feeling that there never *was* a Lippincott: that you just called yourself 'Mrs.' as a kind of protection from droves of silly young men when you travelled round the world; because I said to myself, you were too young and beautiful to be Mrs. Anybody—except Mrs. Hugh St. John Shannon!"

"That was before you knew I was nearly thirty.

Isn't that just a little, *little* disillusion to begin with?"

"Good heavens, no! I wouldn't care if you were as old as Ninon de l'Enclos. I know you'll be more beautiful when you're eighty than you are now. Anyhow, I shall think so."

"You won't be there. You'll be a charming old gentleman celebrating your golden wedding, with crowds of grandchildren round you."

"That may be, with you for the golden bride. Because, though I'm going to do what you wish, and not make love to you in the 'immediate present' (this isn't making love, you know) I won't disguise from you that I have very different intentions for the future. While we're being 'friends,' you will be like a sort of glorious bird of Paradise I've snared, and chained round the foot with a jewelled chain. I let you run, but each day I pull you in by the length of one jewel. I haven't had time to count yet how many jewels there are! Or else, you're like that castle on the rock we were talking about. You think you're impregnable, because you always have been. But already I've swum across the moat, and I'm cutting steps up the rock; one step higher each day. Now, I'm not going to let you answer that, for fear you say something I shan't like. And if I don't like it, you won't either—really. Come with me into the Court of Lions, and get their blessing. They must have seen a good many lovely women in their time—but never one like *my* woman."

His woman! By and bye he would have to know what woman I was, if I could not make him leave me in some easier way. But not now; for I had set this night of the full moon apart in my mind as my happy night.

Hand in hand, we went through the doorway into the Court of Lions where the fountain was minting moonlight into silver, and where the bleak stone faces of the twelve great beasts seemed to gaze at us as kindly as if we were real lovers.

CHAPTER IX

It was a beautiful thing to be friends with Hugh, yet to know that all the while love stood close by, in the background; that though we talked of impersonal things, there was nothing of overwhelming importance in our world, really, except each other. I knew that I was selfish in this happiness. But, after all, I should have to suffer for it in the end more than he. He would learn some day, not to forget, but to look back on all this as a dream, very sweet while it lasted. For he would have his career, and I should have only memories.

I don't know if he was as happy in this interlude as I was. Perhaps not, for he expected far more of life, and I had learned to grasp at a moment's pleasure without looking beyond.

Sarah asked no questions, even with her eyes. I think she did not wish me to tell her what had happened between Hugh and me, or what were our plans for the future, lest I should commit myself in words to some dutiful decision she would long to combat. Yet certainly she was hopeful, and, as always, sublimely selfless.

Her one desire was for me to have happiness at any price, and maybe she thought I was unconsciously drifting towards a safe harbour. Often I heard her singing in her thin, sweet little voice, the

two songs she used once to love best : "Ev'ry day will be *Sunday* by and bye!" and "Weep no more, my lady." This meant that joy which she could not quite keep down was bubbling up from within.

I told Hugh how I had heard him sing that old darkey air, breaking off in the midst; and how I had longed to finish the tune on the other side of the wall. And I told him about the exchange I had made : my magnolia for his oleanders, not guessing till later that Captain Hugh St. J. Shannon with the much-travelled portmanteau, was my "man of the mirror."

"My subconscious self that had known yours for ages was talking to you, and telling you to weep no more," Hugh said. "Don't you think that was it, honour bright? Very intelligent of him to choose that room, too, knowing somehow, as he must have done, that you were coming a fortnight later to live next door. How I wish you had finished the song for me! And how I wish I'd known that magnolia was yours. It would have made all the difference. But anyhow, thank goodness, I didn't leave it to fade in the room. I took it with me and carried it a long way in my hand, thinking of you, till the cold air of the mountains suddenly killed it after a few hours, and I buried it honourably in a rock-pocket of snow."

"Just as the cold air of reality will kill this flower we call our friendship, after a few days," I thought. But I did not speak the thought to him. We talked mostly like good comrades who understand each other, and desire nothing more than they have already. It was only sometimes when twilight fell in the garden, and silence fell between us, that I felt a thrill of danger when our eyes met and we had no wish to speak at all.

He came every day, and we wandered in the Alhambra, or went to walk in the Generalife, the most lovely garden in the world. Often he dined with us, bringing Gelert; and always he was studiously pleasant to Sarah. But there was just that one fault in his manner with her: it *was* studious. It no longer irritated me, however, for I knew the worst, and I saw that he was trying to be more just. Besides, I was vain enough to imagine that his feeling towards her was promoted by an unconscious jealousy of my love for the best friend I ever had, or could have. This idea made me lenient to his lack of sympathy with Sarah, while it glorified her forgiving admiration of him into nobility.

When July came, the heat grew intense, and tried her strength a little. She found it too tiring to walk, until after sundown, so she never went even to the Alhambra. I spent hours there alone with Hugh, or with him and the interpreter; for except on Sundays when people came up from the town or a few young soldiers strolled in because entrance was free, the palace was our own. In the mornings we sat oftenest in the spicy-smelling cypress court of Lindaraja, the Moorish maiden; and late in the afternoons we liked best the alcove called her boudoir, opening on to the Court of Lions. With her windows behind us, green as emeralds because of the tall trees outside, we would watch the sun leave one stone lion after the other, until all were in shadow, and only the little fountain jet in the Court of the murdered Abencerrages danced in the light.

So more than a week passed, and then one evening Hugh announced that the next day would be his birthday.

"I want you to celebrate it with me in a special way," he said. "Will you?"

"I should like to—if I can," I answered. "But have you thought of the way?"

"Oh, yes, I've mapped it all out," he replied promptly. "The obvious part of the plan's very simple and above board. It is, for you and me to spend the afternoon in the Generalife. I was pretty sure you wouldn't mind doing it, so without waiting to consult you I got an order to have all the fountains and all the rivulets of the gardens set going, just for you and me. It will be our show. Nobody who doesn't belong to us will be let in. Not that anyone would be likely to come and bother us there, this blessed hot weather, but I thought it would be just one's luck to have some idiot turn up that day of all others and spoil everything; so I've made very extra special sort of efforts to keep the entertainment private. It had to be done down in the town with the owner's agent, and there was such a lot of red tape about the business, that I began it days ago—the day in the curiosity-shop when you bought the picture of the fountains playing, and said you'd give anything to see them. Does the plan please you?"

"Of course it does," I said. "Shouldn't I be ungrateful if it didn't, when you've remembered my wish, and taken so much trouble to grant it?"

"I'm afraid it wasn't very unselfish, as far as that's concerned. I haven't seen the waters playing there, and I want to. But that's only the obvious part of the celebration. I expected you to consent to that. It's in the esoteric part where the difficulty comes in. I'll have to break it to you."

"What can it be? You almost frighten me. I'd hate to refuse you anything on your birthday, yet you know——"

"Yes, I do know, alas! But this isn't anything to frighten you. It's just a—a sort of game I want you to play with me, for that one afternoon, to make this birthday stand out white and glittering for ever, like a pearl. Then, whatever comes, I shall have had a day which it would be worth my while to have been born for. We've been playing the game of friendship for over a week, haven't we? It's been a glorious game, though only a game—and we both knew that. For my birthday afternoon, with you and me in the garden of Paradise, I want you to change that game for another. 'Let's pretend,' as the children say, that we're a happy, engaged couple. Oh, I know what you're opening your lips to say! Just kindly wait till I've explained. I won't beg anything of you that you aren't willing to give. I won't ask more than to kiss your hand as you let me do now, every night when I say good-bye. The game shall be—so to speak—on the 'spirit level.' But all the same it will be next door to heaven, to play it, if you will. What do you say, dearest—friend?"

"You will have to tell me a few—rules of the game," I laughed, my cheeks growing warm, "before I know whether I—shall be clever enough to play or not."

"You shall make the rules yourself," he promised. "The one thing I hold out for is that, from the time we go into the Generalife until we come out, we are *really* to 'pretend'—in word if not in deed—that we are engaged lovers, who are going to be happy together always. You are to let me hold your hand, and tell you what our life will be like. I don't mean

to entrap you. It won't commit you to anything after the game's played out—my birthday game. It isn't so very much to ask, is it?—considering what I *want* you to give?"

I tried to laugh, and to think calmly through the beating of my heart. I longed to say yes, and have a day—his birthday—to add to the wonderful evening which was already mine to remember. Still, I was afraid—of him and of myself.

"You'd promise not to go on asking me to 'pretend' anything of that sort afterwards?" I began to bargain.

"Yes, I promise not to ask you to pretend anything afterwards."

"Very well, if I may make the rules of the game——"

"With the restrictions mentioned——"

"We'll take them for granted. As it's your birthday—yes, we'll 'pretend.'"

"Thank you a thousand times!" he exclaimed.

I looked up at him a little sadly, though I was smiling. After all, it seemed that he was able to snatch the joy of a moment—or a few hours—more lightly than I could do. I thought that his birthday, and the "celebration" that he asked for, had better mark the end of our eight days' "friendship." The end would have had to come soon, for he must go back to England. He was well again; I alone was keeping him in Granada; and there were communications concerning his late mission that should be made personally to the War Office. I saw that here was the turnstile where we must say farewell, for it would be too difficult in any case to drop back into comradeship after a day of "pretending" to be lovers. I said nothing of what was in my mind,

for that would turn his day of happiness into night. Afterwards, he himself would surely see, if he were reasonable, that since we could not marry, we had reached the parting of the ways. If he would not see, and of his own accord, I thought that rather than tell him what might make him glad to go, I would simply shut myself up in the Carmen de Santa Catalina, and refuse to see him again. It might seem selfish in me to send him away without any real explanation, but in truth it was kind, since in this case ignorance was nearer to bliss than knowledge could be.

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It was very hot walking to the Generalife Gardens, in the July sunshine, but a breeze from the Sierras made it tolerable. Hugh shaded my eyes with my green parasol, and carried a parcel, which was to be Sarah's "birthday surprise" for him at tea time. We did not talk much to each other, for we were both thinking of the "game," and planning how each was to play it.

A dark, smiling young man opened the gate for us, and locked it once more when we were inside the garden.

"Don't forget that the Generalife is mine for the rest of the day, and that it's quite understood no strangers must be admitted," Hugh said in his almost perfect Spanish.

"Now," he went on to me, as we turned up the wonderful avenue of cypresses, "we are luckier than Adam and Eve, because the angel with the flaming sword has shut us into Paradise instead of shutting us out."

"Paradise for a day!" I said. "It sounds like the name of a poem."

"It's going to be a poem," he answered, "and you and I are to live it. A poem set to music. Listen to the waters! They are for us, too. Everything for us. This is our world."

"To-day," I added.

"Hush!" he exclaimed. "That isn't fair. It's not playing the game, to talk about endings, or anything sad. We've got the whole future before us. What's the difference between sixty minutes and sixty years? If there's any, we aren't going to think of it or measure it now."

"Oh, I didn't know we'd begun to play yet," I excused myself.

"We began the instant we came in at the gate. And this isn't the Generalife really, and we're not even in Spain. It is—let me see!—it's Kashmir, which is about as near Paradise as any country can be that doesn't owe its best charm to your being in it. It's Kashmir, and you *are* in it—with me. We're going to be married to-morrow, and this is our last walk together as two lovers. To-morrow we'll be one."

"I thought I was to fix the rules of this game," I reminded him.

"My darling girl, it isn't playing the game to allude to its being a game. Don't you see that? It's real now. And anyhow, you are only to tell me what I mustn't do, not what I must do; and you have no right of jurisdiction at all over what I'm to say."

"We must see how that works," I said, laughing.

"It will work beautifully. Now, just put your mind to it, and remember that you're walking in a garden of Kashmir with your lover, who'll be both husband and lover to-morrow."

"Wouldn't it be more to the point if—I put my

heart to it?" I asked, pressing ever so lightly the arm into which he had slipped my hand.

"I know your heart's in it, or you wouldn't be here," he said. "That's the principal reason why I'm so happy. Listen while I tell what's going to happen to you. We're going to have our honeymoon in a houseboat—the most beautiful, glorified sort of houseboat you can imagine, miles away from everybody. In the mornings I shall wake you up with offerings of cool waterlilies and warm roses. At night I shall put you to sleep with kisses, such kisses as you don't know exist, and I've been starving to give you."

"Don't!" I said. "You're going beyond the rules."

"No, for I'm not giving you the kisses, I'm only talking about them."

"You mustn't," I pleaded. "I—can't bear it—Hugh."

He looked at me suddenly, as we walked slowly side by side, under the immense trees where a treacherous sultana once met her lover.

"That's the sweetest thing you ever said to me," he answered, in the hushed voice with which he could make me feel as if I were in a dim church, full of incense and organ music.

"Could we—play—as well in silence for a little while?" I asked. "Because just for a few minutes I don't want to talk."

"We can play even better with our lips silent," he said, "for then our thoughts can hear themselves speak. You know what mine are telling you, don't you, my darling?"

"Yes," I whispered.

We walked on with my hand on his arm, not saying

anything for a long time. I was on his left side, and I could feel his heart beating against my bare wrist. It was as if it were telegraphing messages to me, by a code of signals, messages which we could not have dared to put into spoken language. I never fully realised before how much nearer—how dangerously much nearer—one is brought to a person one loves by silence, than by the most passionate love-making in words. His silence kissed me, and drew my heart to his, through my eyes, though we were not even looking at each other; his silence held me in his arms and drowned me in its tenderness.

We came to the end of the long avenue of cypresses and roses, which screen white glimpses of snow mountains far away. Hugh rang the house bell, and a girl let us into the court of the first water-garden, made by some Moorish king for a woman he loved. I cried out in surprise, for as the door opened I looked along a flowerly vista arched over and roofed with crystal. I knew the place was beautiful, but I had not dreamed what it could be, with its long double line of fountains.

"Isn't this a good way of celebrating my birthday—and our marriage eve in Kashmir?" Hugh asked, when the girl had vanished, and the garden full of moving rainbows was ours alone.

"Yes, a beautiful way," I agreed.

"Are you happy, oh, queen?"

"I am happy, oh, king."

"Then here we will reign together, and may our reign be long and blessed. I know it will be! Look, this lace canopy of water is like a wedding-veil for you, woven of diamonds by the fairies, our subjects. Come now and see our transfigured realm, terrace by

terrace. The best of all is where the water cascades down the hollowed-out balusters or walls of the steps to the fourth garden—the highest terrace.”

“But I hate to leave this; it’s so marvellous!” I said.

“It will be better by and bye, as the sun sinks lower, and it will be ours still, you know. Everything that belongs to our love will grow more marvellous as time goes on.”

I did not answer. Again in dangerous silence we walked through the cloister-like gallery to the belvedere at the end of the garden court. On the opposite hill, across a valley like a chasm full of sunshine, rose the red towers of the Alhambra with their brown tiled roofs. I glanced across dreamily. It seemed as if the green gulf separated me from the real world. This was a dream world, beautiful as heaven, where Hugh and I lived, and nobody else.

“I can keep this world separate always in my memory,” I thought. “Age and years can’t change it. I shall only have to go into the secret room of my spirit, and lock the door, to find it just as it is now, and Hugh and me, young and happy, walking here together. So I need never be utterly miserable, whatever happens, with such a possession.”

We went slowly up from terrace to terrace. It was good to know that we could linger as long as we liked with no danger that the fountains of the first garden might stop while we were in the second or third or fourth. This was our day, and the waters would make music for us till night came—and the last verse of the poem.

The highest terrace, though not of such sensational beauty as the patio of the fountains, seemed more secret and more our own, like a house walled with

box and myrtle, and roofed with magnolia trees. Hugh sat on a bench under a flowery ceiling of green, patterned with white stars. Then gently he pulled me down beside him.

"This is the deck of our houseboat," he said. "We're not married yet, of course, and won't be till to-morrow; but I'm showing my dear bride-elect where she's to live with me, until she's tired of Kashmir. Do you think that will be soon?"

I shook my head. I knew he wanted me to look up at him, but I would not.

"We shall just live under our hats, you know," he went on, his voice changing from tenderness to gaiety, in a disconcerting way it had. "You and I together—what does anything else matter? We'll eat up the world, and see all that's worth seeing in it, till we go—still together—to one even better. But we'll never forget this day or this place, or lose touch with it. We'll be like the children in fairy stories, and drop white stones all along the road as we walk towards eternity, so we can just take hands and find our way back here to Granada—I mean, to Kashmir."

As he spoke, his hand covered mine, then grasped and held it. I did not try to take it from him. We sat quietly for a moment. Then he said, in a voice that was not quite steady:

"You have little pulses in your fingers."

"So have you," I whispered.

I think that a whisper is nearly as dangerous as silence. It is a faint breeze that wakes sleeping thoughts, like flowers. I felt his hand grasp my hand almost fiercely, as if he were afraid it would be snatched away. I looked up. His eyes plunged deep into mine. There was nothing of me that he did

not take and hold in that gaze. I forgot that we were playing a game, and that I had the right to fix the rules. My breath came fast. There were just his eyes in the world—and his hand on mine. Then the clasp was loosed for a second, and his arm went round me, held me close. Still my eyes looked up, and my breath came fast through parted lips till his took them.

"Do you forgive me?" he asked, when we remembered. "I swear I didn't mean to kiss you when I brought you here—unless—you changed your mind. Have you—oh, Nita, *have* you changed your mind?"

"No," I said. "Yet there's nothing to forgive. It was my fault that you kissed me. I knew it—but I *couldn't* care—then."

"I love you so!" he said. "I made you give me that kiss. I felt as if I should die without it. And it was worth dying for. It's too late to go back now, Nita, to playing games of love or friendship. The real thing has got us. It's a tidal wave carrying us on to life or death. Let it be life. Why not, my soul? You know now that we can't part."

I clung to him, and he held me tight against his breast.

"We must part," I said. "But I love you—I love you! I wish I could die now, this moment, in your arms!"

"Then you want me to die too," he answered. "Well, it would be very good to die, so. But it will be better to live. We're young, and not cold. God knows I'm not! There's a whole life full of love before us. And we've got to face it. There's no way back, now."

"No, there is no way back," I repeated.

"Thank God you see that."

"I see the way on, into the future; and I see myself walking alone. Let me go, Hugh. We'll have to end this—somehow—since we can't go back to the foolish game we were playing. Oh, if only we hadn't begun it!"

"Do you wish that?" he asked.

"No!" I cried out. "I don't wish that. I can't. I'm glad you have kissed me. I shall have one more sweet thing to remember."

"You shall have a thousand of them to remember!" His eyes suddenly laughed to mine, as if he were sure that after all he was going to be happy. "Don't you know that one kiss leads to another? Nita——"

I pushed him gently away, very gently, with my hand on his lips. They clung to it.

"No," I said. "No."

"But you're driving me mad—you, and the magnolias, which are your own flowers, soft and white, and sweet as life and love and death. We've got to go on now, as we've begun. You'll have to be my wife, in spite of yourself and all your bad resolutions."

"Remember your promise—if I played the game. It was all to end to-day."

"Yes, the game was to end—and it has ended, of itself, much sooner than we meant. I promised, in so many words, not to ask you to go on pretending. We're up against realities now, and if there's to be no more playing, there must be no more mysteries. I wouldn't be a man, but a sickly sentimentalist, if I let you go on saying you can't marry me or anybody without making you tell me the reason, and give me a chance to beat it down with a better one. Our friendship has lasted us beauti-

fully for eight days; but it's worn out now, and you know it. I've been unnaturally good, and haven't worried you once, have I? Though I must admit I wouldn't have tried to be quite so obedient if I hadn't thought the days might be useful in making you like me a little better, and perhaps feel the need of me in your life."

"Oh, I do feel the need of you," I said. "But—I can't have you. It isn't just some foolish whim you can break down, as you seem to think. If it were, I'd tell you now, this moment, and hope that you *could* break it."

"Then don't tell, but marry me all the same. There's nothing I need know about you, except what I do know, as I told you before. That you are you, and that life can never be life again without you. Marry me to-morrow—as we were playing you would in the game. Surely I can get a special licence or something. The consul——"

"Ah, if I could!" I cried. "If I could! If we could go to the end of the earth together, where we should never see anyone except each other, then maybe——"

"We will go to the end of the earth, if that's the price of you," he broke in. "We'll live in tents in the desert if you like. I've done it for months, and could do it for ever."

"It would be heaven," I murmured, shutting my eyes for a minute, to see the picture of the tent among sand dunes. "If you hadn't a career. Do you think I'd let you give it up for me?"

"Damn my career!" he said. "I've cared for it, yes—such as it is. But if there's to be a question of choosing between a woman I adore, and pottering along in the army with now and then some special

mission any other fellow could do as well or better, why, I——"

"You think so now," I interrupted him. "But as the years went on, and you saw other men doing what it had been your ambition to do, it would break your heart——"

"It wouldn't, I tell you," he said, looking dogged, and, I thought, adorable.

"I wouldn't risk it for anything on earth, neither for my own sake nor yours," I insisted. "Not even for your love, though now—after to-day—I don't see how I am to go on existing—it won't be living—without you."

"Tell me what keeps us apart, and let me judge," he said again.

"I would, if it could do any good. But if I told you, even if you said you'd take me in spite of everything—though I don't think you or any man would do that—I'd rather die than marry you—yes, Hugh, because I love you so much. I should have to send you away simply because I couldn't bear to look you in the face again, after you knew."

"I'd take my oath that you make a thousand times more of the thing than you need, whatever it is," he tried to soothe me. "I'm certain you've done nothing evil. It's beyond your nature."

"Don't be too sure!"

"I am sure. If you told me with your own lips, in a detailed statement, that you were the greatest sinner who ever lived, I wouldn't believe you. I'd believe you'd dreamed it."

"Dreamed it! Oh, Hugh, what I've suffered in dreaming it!"

I covered my eyes with my hands, to shut out the

gray figure in the gray dream that rose before me. And as I so shut out the sunlight, gray shadows seemed to close coldly around me, until Hugh took me in his arms.

I did not try to push him away again. I let him hold me, so that I might feel and know, just once, the dear comfort and protection a man can give the woman he loves. His arms felt strong and hard, like warm iron.

"Dearest," he said, "what are we going to do about this? The tyranny of the weak over the strong is a lot worse than the other way round, and I can't force you, without being a brute. But we're not going to lose each other for a scruple. I've got you, and somehow I mean to hold you fast. Don't harden your heart against me on my birthday, here in this garden where the perfume of your own flower is incense on the altar of love. Say you'll marry me and live in the desert, if the desert is what you want."

Incense on the altar of love! Yes, the perfume was like that. and it was in my head, making me forget right and wrong.

"I want you in the desert, Hugh—my Hugh," I whispered, clinging to him. "I want you as much as you want me—more, maybe, because you're all my life. I didn't know there were such men as you. You're so dear—so dear. I love all your ways—everything you are. Oh, take me, if you will—not to the desert, because you must have your career. There'd be no happiness for me if I broke it. But if I'm willing to give you everything, and take nothing from you—except your love, surely I shouldn't be harming you after all? It's only as your wife I should hurt you. But hide me some-

where, and let nobody know but Sarah. We'll love each other so much—and if I see I'm hurting you, I'll go away——”

Suddenly he pressed me so tight against his breast that my breath went. I could not speak another word.

“Be still, Nita!” he said in a strange voice. “For the love of God, don't tempt me like that! I won't have you at such a price! I'd rather die—and let you die. It isn't as if there were a real obstacle of flesh and blood between us. If you were the wife of some brute you hated, who ill-treated you, it would be different. I'd take you from him like a shot. But as it is, if I took you at your word, I should be the brute. I won't do it!”

Now it was he who tried to put me from him, but I wound my arms round his neck, and would not let him go. For the first time I kissed him of my own accord. I kissed his strong brown throat, and the dent in his square chin, until he forgot that he had meant to tear himself away from me. He set his mouth against mine, while the beating of our two hearts was as the beating of one. For a moment I was happy. I thought that in spite of all, a way opened for us to belong to each other, without my spoiling his life, since no one need know of my existence.

But it was only while the kiss lasted. Then he sprang up, though I would have held him if I could.

“Nita, I can't stand this!” he said, in a choked voice which frightened me. “I daren't touch you—daren't kiss you again, now. If I did—I'd forget everything—and that would be damnable! Stay where you are. I'm going to walk away and not

even look at you for a minute or two, until I'm myself again."

He turned, and took a step or two along the path, his head down. A great pity for us both and a great shame for myself welled up in my heart. I rose, looking after him, but not calling him back. Then, standing under the magnolia, I saw what I could hardly believe to be real, for the garden was ours. Two women were mounting the steps from the terrace below.

CHAPTER X

HUGH also saw them. Somehow I realised by the expression of his back, the sudden tenseness of his figure, that he knew who they were.

I stood still, watching, not sure yet what I ought to do. They came up the steps slowly, as if they were tired. Both were dressed in light travelling dresses, and wore very fashionable hats crushed forward on their heads. They carried large, pagoda-shaped parasols of the newest kind, and it seemed to me that smartness was their chief characteristic. One was tall and rather stout, with a finely disciplined figure; the other, much younger, was tall and slim. The elder woman had on a white veil with a large pattern of butterflies or some other insect, which gave her the appearance of having several hideous birthmarks. The younger wore no veil, and was pretty, with delicate features, fair skin, large gray eyes, and yellowish brown hair.

There would have been no time for us to escape before they caught sight of us, even if we had tried. After the first shock of dismay at their awful irrelevance, I was thankful that, at least, they had not come a minute sooner. If they had, they must have seen me in Hugh's arms. As it was, they could see only that he was with a woman in the

garden, and that—perhaps—he looked agitated. But I hoped they might put this down to surprise.

"Here you are, then, Hugh!" exclaimed the woman with the veil, in a voice so cheerful as to sound affected. "We have had a chase to find you—oh, such a hot one! Poor Kath didn't want to come, but I made her, when the hotel guide said he was sure you were in the Generalife garden. I've heard so much of it."

Hugh, without having said a word, went to meet them as the lady talked on, and his air of reluctance was so marked as to be almost offensive.

I glanced about anxiously, to see if I could get away without actually passing them. If there were any hope of doing so, now was the moment, while they were saying "How do you do?" to each other, and Lady Mendel (I felt sure it was she, come to spy out what was really keeping Hugh in Granada) told how the guide had brought them to the gate, and they had been let in after some difficulty, by saying they were not strangers. "I assured the man I was your sister, and then it was all right," the too cheerful voice explained.

Already she and the girl had looked at me without seeming to look. I felt in every nerve exactly what they were thinking. They were putting me down as some adventuress who had beguiled Hugh from his duty. He would perhaps have the stupid, mannish idea that he ought to introduce us, in order not to give them a wrong impression. I could not go through that ceremony!

Already I knew that they had taken him away from me. I had lost him. Not that he had ever been mine, really; but he might have yielded, and accepted me on my own terms, if they had not

come at the moment of crisis. Even this would have been better than nothing. And if I had won him in that way, I could have left him when I saw that he did not want me any more, or that my association with him was likely to do him harm. Now we were parted, without hope of any union. I must go. My time was over.

On the seat where we had been sitting was poor Sarah's "surprise." We had forgotten it, Hugh and I. In my eyes it seemed pathetic, done up in its neat white paper, tied daintily with narrow ribbon by Sarah's deft fingers. I knew what was inside. A thermos bottle she had bought for a birthday gift for Hugh, and filled with iced tea, flavoured with lemon, as he liked it. There were also cream cakes, with little white, self-satisfied faces. I thought that he would go with his sister and her friend, and forget Sarah's surprise. He would never know what it was. She would ask me when I went home: "Well, was the Captin pleased with my little present?" I felt dully miserable, and even injured, because I could not tell her that he had been delighted.

Suddenly I turned, as the three still talked together, and swiftly and silently I walked along a path leading away from the group. The ladies could see me go, but Hugh could not. I was sure that they would not say anything until I was out of sight.

Sarah was sitting on the terrace near the house door. I knew when I saw her there that she could not resist taking a place where she was certain not to miss me as I came home. There was a look of expectation on her face. Her eyes sprang to mine, then searched for someone she did not see.

"Why!" she exclaimed, trying to suppress an

anxious note in her voice. "You're back sooner than I thought you'd be. It must be mighty hot in the sun. Where's the Captin? Ain't he comin' in with you?"

I had been thinking what to say, as I walked alone along the golden way of sunlight we had travelled together, Hugh and I, not two hours before.

"I ran off and left him," I answered with a heavy attempt at gaiety. "His sister, Lady Mendel, suddenly appeared to surprise him, and brought a girl—quite a pretty girl. I don't know who she is, for I disappeared while they were all shaking hands. Of course, I didn't want to stay and be introduced."

"No-o, I suppose not," Sarah said doubtfully, ending with a sigh. "But still, I wouldn't want you to do anything that would seem rude to the Captin's relations."

"Little they cared whether I was rude or not. I was lucky to escape. Oh, it was hot coming home. The wind's gone down."

"Did you have your tea?" she asked. She was working slyly up to the question of the birthday present. Poor Sarah!

"No, we hadn't had time when Lady Mendel came. Perhaps they will all three have it—in the garden there. And when he is able, Captain Shannon will come and thank you for the bottle, and for making him the cakes. He's sure to be pleased."

I did not dream that he would ever find the gift, much less thank her for it; but I could not bear to tell her that it had been forgotten. I did not believe that Hugh would come that night. I did not see how he could. His sister would be certain to keep him.

I was mistaken, however. I had not been at home an hour when I heard his voice. I was upstairs in my room, where I had taken off my frock and put on a tea-gown. I had told Sarah that the heat had given me a headache, and that I would lie down until time to get ready for dinner, or perhaps if I did not feel better I would not dine. I could not help knowing that she must suspect something had gone wrong, but, tactful and delicate-minded always, she hid her disappointment. I felt how she yearned to be with me, but I could not ask her to stay; I had to be alone. She understood without the slightest hint, and let me know that she was far away by singing, "Weep no more, my lady."

Then Hugh came. He must have walked fast, in spite of the heat, for he asked breathlessly, "Where is your Miss Nita?" He always called me that in speaking of me to Sarah. He hated to say "Mrs. Lippincott."

I listened in my room over the door. He had come—he had come! Hiding behind the window-frame, I caught a glimpse of his dear dark head as he walked across the terrace.

"Miss Nita's upstairs lyin' down," said Sarah. "I reckon the hot sun was too much for her, comin' home."

"I'm afraid so," said Hugh. "Do you think it's possible she would see me? I'd wait any length of time. I wouldn't have her hurried. But if she's well enough—I do want to see her so much! Will you ask her? And, oh, Miss Nelson, a thousand thanks for that splendid birthday present—my only one. It's just what I've always been wanting, and nobody but you ever thought to give it to me." (I was grateful to him for that.)

"Well, I'm real pleased," exclaimed Sarah. "I'll run and ask Miss Nita. I reckon I can get her to come down. You go along to the arbour and wait. It's cooler than on the terrace." Then there was silence. She was coming upstairs.

"You needn't tell me; I've heard," I said. "Do you think I might go down in this tea-gown?"

"My goodness me, yes, honey. You look prettier in it than most anything else you've got."

She had chosen and bought it for me, as she had most of my things.

Hugh was walking up and down impatiently in front of the fountain arbour, dusty and hot, but pale, not red. If his sister had seen him, she might have thought that he needed a longer stay in Granada, on account of his health.

When he saw me coming, he hurried to meet me, taking long strides, which made him look even taller than he was. It seemed as if a young giant was rushing toward me, strong and determined as the Roman men who stole the Sabine women.

"How thankful I am to see you again!" he said, seizing my hands as if we had not met for a year. "I felt as if you'd eluded me somehow, and I could never get you back where I had you before—as if everything were over."

"So it is," I answered. "I've lost your respect by what I said. If I were a conventional woman, I should be thanking heaven that your sister appeared just then. It was—quite dramatic, wasn't it?"

"Don't be bitter, darling. It doesn't suit you, and it hurts me, rather badly. I wish my sister were in Jericho—and she ought to be there, instead of here, anyhow. She'd no business to come, and the Lord knows why she did!"

"So do I, and so do you. I realise now that I felt she would come—after that letter. You never answered it, did you?"

"No. I was always going to. But there was no hurry. Well, here she is. Good heavens, what I went through, trotting those two round that beastly garden——"

I laughed shrilly.

"Our Generalife!"

"It wasn't ours when you'd melted away like a ghost. I hated the place. It *was* beastly. And they would guzzle our dear tea and cakes—my birthday cakes. I wouldn't have been sorry if they'd choked."

"You're very unbrotherly," I said; but I began to be lighter of heart. "And ungallant, too. That pretty girl!"

"Pretty, do you call her? She's got a face like a Christmas card, or a soda-water advertisement, and a sort of blotting-paper intelligence which only absorbs knowledge from outside, and keeps it the opposite of what it really is. There's nothing in her. I always thought so, and I think so more than ever now. As for being unbrotherly, Beatrice is only my half-sister, you know. We never had tastes in common. If she agrees with me in anything, I always feel I must have been wrong, and change my mind. Wants me to call her 'Bee.' Can you see anyone calling her Bee? She has drunk up my vitality like water since she came to-day. I'm a squeezed sponge."

"You haven't come just to tell me all this, though, have you?" I said. "If there's anything special, remember we haven't much time together. You will have to go back to her and the pretty

girl. I'm surprised you were able to come at all."

"Are you really? Didn't you know I'd chuck them, and make for this house as fast as my legs could carry me? My word, I nearly walked them off theirs, getting to the hotel! It gave me the only pleasure I've got out of their coming. I believe they're having baths now. Look here, my dearest, will you and Miss Nelson ask me to dinner?"

"Certainly not!" I exclaimed. "Do you think it would please me for you to be rude to your sister and her friend, who have travelled such a long way—from Paris, isn't it?—to see you?"

"I could say I had a previous engagement I couldn't break."

"You must say no such thing," I said. "You must go back, and dine with them, and not give Lady Mendel cause to think I'm more of a monster than she thinks me already."

Hugh looked astonished.

"What possesses you to imagine she thinks badly of you? As a matter of fact, she admired you immensely, and so did Kathleen—oh, I forgot, you don't know who she is. Lady Kathleen Arnott, a great chum of Beatrice's, though she's almost young enough to be her daughter. Beatrice and Kath both said, 'What a beautiful girl!' and of course they were dying to know who you were, and all about you."

"Of course, Hugh, dear! That goes without saying. What did you tell them?"

"Why, what could I tell them, except that you were a Mrs. Lippincott, a young widow, living in a villa near by with a benevolent dragon of a companion, and that you had a miniature Generalife of a

garden you'd redeemed from wilderness, where you and Miss Nelson kindly let me browse sometimes."

I laughed.

"The minotaur had a nice garden in his labyrinth," I say. Oh, I don't blame Lady Mendel for considering me a monster. Indeed, she's right. I oughtn't to exist. And I think she's right, too, in coming to save you—and bringing an antidote to the poison."

"I wish you wouldn't talk in riddles. You make me feel like some baited animal in a cage."

My heart melted towards him.

"Hugh," I said, holding out my hand, "I'm a wretch for trying to hurt you. I *was* trying to do it, I'm afraid—because all my world's in such a turmoil, and I'm so miserable. But none of it is your fault, or your sister's—or anybody's except my own. I can't help seeing, of course, that Lady Mendel must have said to herself when you stayed on here, in the heat of summer, '*Cherchez la femme.*' So when she wrote and didn't hear from you, things seemed desperate, and she came to seek *la femme* for herself, bringing another as attractive as possible. Then she found us in the garden which you'd paid to keep to yourself for the afternoon, as of course that intelligent guide told her. No strangers were to be admitted. What could she think?"

"Whatever she thinks, she'll get my version soon. I haven't seen her alone yet, for I rushed off and left the two of them at the door of their suite—they'd taken rooms at the hotel before they came on to the Generalife, so that saved me a little bother. Some time this evening, I shall tell Beatrice that you're the woman I adore, and have asked to marry me."

"If you do, you must please tell her at the same

time that I have refused," I said, as softly and kindly as I could, to make the words sound less harsh.

"I'll tell her that if you insist; but I shall tell her also that I intend to devote the next few months or years if necessary, to making you change your mind."

"Don't, my dearest," I implored, "for it will only worry and distress her for nothing. I shall never marry you. It would be—a crime to change my mind, just as much of a crime and more—much more—than for you to—to take me at my word to-day when I——"

"When you made me love you a million times more, if possible, by offering the most magnificent self-sacrifice a woman can offer to a man who worships her. That's the way I look at it, though I'd shoot myself—and you too, I think—sooner than accept it, when I'm dead sure there's nothing really to keep us from marrying."

"Oh—please! please!" I stammered. "I can't go on—to-night. I'm tired, body and soul."

"Poor child, I won't bruise you any more. I oughtn't to have routed you out when Miss Nelson said you were lying down. But I simply had to see you for a minute. I even thought you might not be sorry to see me, after——"

"I'm thankful. I couldn't have closed my eyes to-night if you hadn't come—though I wasn't sure you could."

"Angel! Wild horses or even unicorns couldn't have kept me from you, to say nothing of half-sisters. But Beatrice was one excuse for my coming. I had to ask you what to do—for I know a man is a first-rate ass about such things, and I was afraid if I acted on my own initiative I might make some stupid

blunder from your point of view. You see, she and Kathleen Arnott admired you so much, and Beatrice made no end of a fuss about my begging you to let them call on you, and see your wonderful garden. I wish to goodness I hadn't been wool-headed enough to mention the garden! My impulse was to say I couldn't ask permission, because you were not strong yet after a long illness, and never received anybody except a few old friends. Of course if I had, she'd have wanted to know how old our friendship was, and I could have told a lie, or said it was none of her business. But I wasn't sure whether either way would be the proper dodge, so I promised I would ask you. Don't say you'll have her for my sake."

I thought the thing over for a minute.

"I'm glad you didn't tell her not to come," I said. "Lady Mendel will never see or hear of Mrs. Lippincott again, away from Granada, so why need it matter to me what her opinion is? Still I'm just foolish enough to feel I can't let anyone who's near to you think of me as she might if I refused to receive her here. You see—I've no excuse—except one that would make things worse. When does she want to call?"

"Well—I hope she'll go away day after to-morrow. I only wish it might be to-morrow!"

"She wants you to go with them, of course."

Hugh laughed.

"As the servants say, she'll have to 'take it out in wanting.'"

"But I hope you will go, Hugh. Yes, I do hope it. I ask it! To stay is only prolonging the agony for us both. The sooner you're gone, the better it will be for you—and for me too."

"I don't believe you mean that with your heart. If I did, it would be the end of me, I think."

"I mean it with my soul—and that ought to rule my heart. Bring Lady Mendel and Lady Kathleen Arnott to see me to-morrow, then—at any time they like to come."

"Thank you," he said, almost indifferently. "But what about this evening? You'll let me come to you again after dinner, won't you? Do, Nita! Do say I may come. After our talk this afternoon, I can't stay away from you all those hours, and hang about with Beatrice and Kathleen!"

I shook my head.

"You mustn't come until you bring them."

The thought in my mind was, that I must call upon all my strength, and refuse to see him alone again, ever. I must write and tell him this, saying that it would be useless to stay on after Lady Mendel went, for the gate of the garden would be shut henceforth. I had not the courage to tell him face to face. I should suffer too much, and his agony, his arguments would break me down. I could not stand against them.

"Then why not let us all three come in this evening?" he asked unexpectedly. Could it be possible, I asked myself, that he suspected what I was resolving to do afterwards? "I know they're dying to come. It's curiosity, of course, but I don't think, honestly, it's as bad a variety of it as you give them credit for. They told me they were starving after their long journey straight through from Madrid, so they'll dine early, and I know you do, because you love sitting in the garden later. Mayn't we walk over here about half-past eight? The garden's at its best then, in the dusk, and you've got a nightingale or two left, haven't you?"

The thought that flashed through my head was : "Prying eyes can't see so clearly by twilight as by day," and I answered promptly : "Yes, come to-night, if they're not too tired."

"Oh, I know they're not," he said. "Beatrice asked me herself if to-night would suit—but of course I couldn't answer for you. And I wonder—anyhow—if I ought to let her come near you at all?"

"Why not?"

"I don't know. There's no reason particularly, except—well, a sort of feeling I have. She was charming about you, very complimentary and all that; but—she and I never really understood each other. We're no more alike than the North Pole is to the South, though of course we're fond of each other in a way, and she's tried to be nice to me according to her lights. Lately it's become a kind of superstition with her that her whole life has been devoted to helping me on in the world, and that she married a man old enough to be her father for my sake."

"Did she do that?" I asked, suddenly interested.

"She did marry an elderly man—I think not in the least for my sake, though I give her credit for sincerely believing so now. I couldn't talk about her like this, to anyone except you, darling; but I want you to have some idea of what she is, before she bears down on you with all sails set."

"It sounds formidable!" I tried to laugh.

"Oh—it won't be that, exactly. But she has—er—an idea of her own importance, and she's inclined to exaggerate mine, as a member of her family—except when she talks to me. Beatrice is ten years older than I am, you know. She was eight or so when her mother and mine married my father. Not

long ago she was awfully good looking. Now she's growing stout and losing her beauty—er—promptly if not prematurely. Sir Joseph Mendel married her because she was supposed to be the handsomest girl of her season, and thought himself lucky to get her. He was a jolly good old fellow, though : a Jewish City man who'd got knighted for some charity or other, before my time. He was rolling in money, and Beatrice now is anxious to impress upon me the fact that her one motive in taking him was to relieve me of her support. That's rather funny, you know, because she always adored jewellery and frocks, and boxes at the opera and everything women like. They had to be a shade better than anybody else's, to please her. And my father's money, which he left entirely to me—mother being dead long before—only amounts to a thousand a year. If I'd given her the lot, she wouldn't have had what she uses up for pin money. So you see her contention's rather weak ; but she has every other kind of sense except a sense of humour. She would rather like to 'run' me, as a reward for what she calls 'sacrificing her youth,' but she wouldn't respect me as much as she does if I let her do it for a minute."

"Do forgive me, Hugh," I ventured, "for saying things I've no right to say—even to you. But it's in my thoughts—it so longs to come out ! She *does* want you to marry Lady Kathleen Arnott ?"

"My dear child, what an imagination you've got ! I don't suppose Kathleen would have me if I asked her—which nothing earthly would induce me to do. I've known her ever since she was a kid. Lord Blackburn, her father, is a widower without much money, and Joe Mendel bought a place adjoining his in Warwickshire. The next year poor old Joe died.

Beatrice has taken Kathleen about a lot. If she wants to make any match in that family it's between herself and Blackburn, who's an earl, you know, and rather by way of being a swell—though church mice are financiers beside him. And he's got an old black and white Elizabethan house Beatrice is quite mad about. Altogether——"

"Yes, I see," I said, when he paused for a word.

I saw more than he, probably, saw himself. And I realised that it was spiteful in me to blame Lady Mendel. It was natural in every way that she should be anxious for Hugh to marry Kathleen Arnott. "Altogether——" as he had said with some other meaning in his mind, it would be "most suitable." I could imagine the exact tone in which Lady Mendel or any worldly-wise woman I used to know in other times would say that of such a proposed match. And very likely, though he did not dream now that it couldn't happen, some day it would come about. The prettiest with the large eyes and the tiny mouth, and the "outing-paper intelligence" would be—Hugh's wife, the mother of his children, loved by him for their sake. Somehow this last thought was a bolt of hot iron shot through my brain. I could have cried out with the anguish of it. I could see those little babies, that should be mine. I, and I only, ought to call them into existence for him, down the primrose path of love.

I felt, with that picture in my mind, that I should scream, or burst into ridiculous tears, unless I made him go. I told him that the sooner he went the sooner he could return. Sarah would be coming to call me in. She knew I was tired—I must rest, especially as I was to meet his sister.

"I want to look my best for her and Lady Kathleen," I said.

"You look your best as you are now," he answered. "You are like a tall white lily growing in the shadow. Will you let me kiss you just once—very gently—before I go?"

"Yes, kiss me—good-bye," I said. And though I smiled at him, I told myself that it was our last kiss.

CHAPTER XI

WHEN Hugh had gone my heart went on beating heavily, as if he were still with me. I could not keep my hands quiet, and it seemed as if I could feel a separate vibration in every nerve. I was afraid of Lady Mendel. I was afraid that I could guess why she wanted to see me.

A flash of fear passed across Sarah's face when I told her, but she forced herself to smile and say that I must make myself beautiful for the captain's sister. "I reckon her ladyship wants to find out what's bin keepin' her brother from his folks all this time," she remarked in the sprightly manner with which she used to "cheer" me in the past, when hope was to be awakened, or terror put to sleep. "You just show her that there's bin somethin' worth while stayin' for."

I did not need Sarah's urging to try to "make myself beautiful" for Lady Mendel. Not that I had anything to gain from her by winning reluctant admiration; rather the contrary, for the more dangerous she found me, the more would she sharpen her weapons. But I suppose, when the Roman gladiators went into the arena to fight, they took pains with their appearance, that those about to die who saluted Cæsar might shine with brief glory as they passed his throne. Perhaps even the women

thrown to the lions smoothed their hair and arranged their draperies before their cell doors opened, and pinched colour into their cheeks in order that the staring eyes of other women might find them brave.

But it was not only for Hugh's sister that I wished to be at my best, nor was it half for Lady Kathleen Arnott. More than all I wished him to think me more beautiful than the woman he might some day marry. I expected never to meet him again after this night; and so, I thought, his last memory of me would be side by side with a sheltered, flower-like girl, ten years younger and twenty years happier than I. A vanity which I realised to be selfish made me long to have the comparison in my favour.

An ideal woman would have moved into the background, so that the man she loved and could not marry might forget more easily, and be happy all the sooner. Yet, though I saw my own selfishness, I could not even try to conquer it.

There was no dinner for Sarah and me that night. I told her that I could not eat, but asked for a cup of strong coffee, which she brought to my room with her favourite dose of orange-leaf tea to soothe the nerves. I begged her not to go fasting unless she wished to distress me, and she promised to make herself tea and toast.

"I couldn't swallow anything else, an' you keyed up the way you are," she said piteously. "I seem to be livin' in you to-night somehow, and all your feelin's come through me, like they was telegraphed right to my heart. An' a body can't eat with electricity shootin' through them in every direction, like it is with you an' me; though all the same I reckon we're both mighty foolish to get worked up for no

cause. Nothin' bad is goin' to happen, honey. Now don't you be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," I answered. "Only——"

"I know," she soothed me, when I choked on the next word. "It's right natural. But—but I reckon it's on'y somethin' in the air—a sort of breathlessness."

Yes. Something in the air. A sort of breathlessness.

Marta and Pepé had gone as usual, and Hugh had been told that the gate would be left unlocked, so that he could bring Lady Mendel and Lady Kathleen in without ringing.

At a quarter past eight I was dressed in the gown I had worn to the Alhambra for the full moon, and was walking in the garden. I tried to sit still on 'he terrace, where Sarah had grouped several chairs for the expected visitors, and to quiet my nerves by reading; but my muscles seemed to have turned into springs which I could not control. I bounded up and began to walk almost involuntarily. Besides, it was my dear volume of Browning which I had brought out to read, as a test of strength. I meant to compose my mind with the organ strains of "Sordello," but the book opened to "Pippa Passes," which I had been reading *that night* when the gray dream first began. It seemed an omen. With a shiver, I tossed the volume away on to another chair, as I jumped up.

I dreaded to hear the big clock somewhere down in Granada strike the half hour after eight; but when it had struck, and the minutes passed on I longed to hear the voices which would tell me the visitors were in the garden. I felt I could not wait to know the worst; and I reproached myself and I reproached

because I had not parted with Hugh finally before his sister came and saw my face. Perhaps this sick terror was of my imagination, only worse than what I had suffered at Margate because what I feared was of so much more importance to me now than then. Every shadow in my garden where I had once found peace was a dark cave of presentiment, stored full of sinister things that were alive and rustling.

I prayed for the voices; but when suddenly the prayer was broken by the sound of them, my heart hammered, and I wished that one of the blows might kill me, before I had to meet Lady Mendel. I wondered if Sarah's heart ever felt like that, and if so, how she managed to live and look so calm, except when the wild light flashed into her eyes.

I forced myself to walk slowly towards the gate, and the pounding in my breast stopped, because my heart seemed to have turned to water. I could feel the trickling of it through my veins just as the water was now running along the edges of the paths and the flower-beds.

Lady Mendel was talking. Although I had heard it only once, for a moment, I was sure it was her voice, and not the girl's, because it sounded almost old, and full of self-confidence and importance. "What a charming garden, yet how un-English!" she was saying.

I heard Hugh's laugh—yet not quite his own, as when he laughed with me. "That 'yet' is thoroughly characteristic of you," he said. "Nothing un-English can be quite perfect!"

"You two young Irish people forget that I *am* English," the reply came clearly, linking Hugh and Lady Kathleen purposely together. I wondered if

she hoped that I was near, and hearing? As Sarah would have said, I did not "put it past her." I was very glad that Lady Mendel was only Hugh's half-sister. I should have hated myself for feeling towards one wholly of his flesh and blood, very dear to him as well as very near, as I felt towards her already.

At that minute we came into sight of each other; and the thought flashed through me that my sudden stony calmness must be like that of an actress who loses her stage-fright only when she hears her "cue." Hugh's last speech was my "cue" to greet the visitors, and I said my words in a voice which sounded pleasant and natural enough. It rather interested something in me that was not me, but had come to help me through, to feel that this was like a scene on the stage. I was the heroine of the play, in my own eyes, yet it was like acting a great part in a dream, because I did not know any more of my words, or what must come next, for there had been no rehearsals. I must stumble along as best I could, and make up what I had to say by means of cues coming from the other actors.

Hugh was looking at me with encouragement and love in his eyes, which he gave to me as a message. He did not seem to care if his sister or even Lady Kathleen saw it. Perhaps he wanted them to see—because of something which had happened. I wondered—and the thought set my heart to pounding again, so that for an instant the three figures were clouded. Then I steadied myself with an effort. The mist cleared. I saw Lady Mendel even taller, handsomer, more important than in her travelling dress at the Generalife.

Her head was uncovered, and her chestnut hair,

which looked as if it might be cleverly dyed to hide its own fading colour, was exquisitely arranged. I felt sure, in spite of Lady Mendel's preference for things English, that this was the latest fashion in Paris. There were waves round the long, yet full face, and flat auburn bands held in place with large pins of greenish jade. She wore an evening cloak of purple chiffon, through which her bare neck and arms, and her green satin gown glimmered mysteriously. Lady Kathleen's frock was of pale, rose-coloured material, girlishly made, and the two graceful figures moving between the hedges of cut myrtle had the effect of blowing flowers. When they came near, Lady Kathleen lost nothing in charm of tint and outline, but Lady Mendel was no longer flowerlike. I saw that her features, though handsome, had grown hard and massive, more as if moulded by her thoughts and experiences of life than by time. She did not look old, but I could not fancy her as ever having been a girl. Her brows were set remarkably high above the eyes, which gave a large sweep of drooping white lid and an expression of haughtiness. Her nostrils were thick and small, with no perceptible quiver as she breathed, which made her appear peculiarly unsensitive, and her upper lip was straight and long. In the soft twilight her complexion appeared to be beautiful, though in the afternoon I had thought her too florid. When Hugh introduced us to each other, she threw back folds of purple chiffon and put out a superb hand and arm with a gesture which told that both were generally admired. I caught a glitter of rings, but the wrist was too perfect to be hidden with bracelets. She took my hand in hers with an air of cordiality, but when she had it, gave no pressure,

so that my hand was at a loss what to do with itself in the loose, cool cage. It was released, however, in an instant.

"How do you do, Mrs. Lippincott? It is so nice of you to let us come," she said in a full, clear voice, which gave to each word the value of an heirloom, and somehow produced an impression of royal patronage. But when she spoke to Lady Kathleen immediately after, she became more human, almost motherly. "It is even more charming here than we expected from Hugh's account, isn't it, dear? Quite refreshing after our long journey in that blazing train."

Lady Kathleen did not offer me her hand. She kept both arms hanging straight and stiffly down under a filmy pink cloak, as if she were shy and self-conscious. She was very pretty, very delicate and elusive looking in the blue twilight, like a tall wood-nymph feeling awkward in modern costume. She seemed, at a glance, all eyes and fluffy hair, for the pink down-curving mouth was so small, and the little white chin so short, that one's gaze seemed to focus on the big violet eyes and pass the rest unnoticed.

"Will you come to the terrace?" I asked. "It is our view place, and all the lights are beginning to shine out down below. It's the most beautiful moment, we think. Afterwards we must walk through the garden, if you care to see it, before it grows too dark."

"Please take us where you please," said Lady Mendel, in the nobly patronising tone which sounded to me like that of a great personage opening a bazaar. "Are we to meet your friend, Miss—er—Nelson, who is such a devoted person, according to Hugh?"

"Thank you, I'm afraid not," I answered. "She isn't strong, and is not feeling well this evening." So far I spoke the truth. Sarah had begged to hide herself, unless I needed her to "stand by me," and, taking pity upon her, I had said there was no reason why she should trouble to appear. But my next words were far from true. "She will be very sorry to miss you." They sounded insincere as I mechanically spoke them, but I did not care whether Lady Mendel thought them so or not.

We talked a little on the terrace, all four together looking over the low wall at the stars of light coming to birth on the Vega. Hugh tried to draw me out, so that his sister might realise what a wonderful person I was. His ingenuous wish to make me shine came nearer to making me cry and laugh, for the funniness and pathos of it. Lady Kathleen scarcely spoke at all, except when Lady Mendel or Hugh asked her some question. I realised that she felt herself out of place, that she had not wished to come, and was anxious to get away. She seemed to me like a creature of a different world from mine, a world of nice girls and jolly young men, and country-house parties, and an interest in dancing and bridge and cricket and polo. She would probably laugh and have plenty to chatter about in that world—and she would look lovely in a white satin wedding-dress with a silver brocade train, and floating film of tulle veil.

When I could think of no more to say, and Lady Mendel seemed a little tired of telling about the hot journey from Paris to Madrid, the broiling journey from Madrid to Granada, I suggested going to look at the garden.

"I wonder if you'll mind my sitting here with

you, and letting Hugh show Kathleen about? He's so in love with your garden he must know it all quite well," said Lady Mendel. "I feel the reaction coming on now, in this delicious cool air, and suddenly realise how tired I am. I can't think of anything more attractive than resting in one of these basket chairs, while other people not so lazy take exercise."

"Do, please, show Lady Kathleen everything, Captain Shannon," I said.

The girl brightened a little, smiling her pretty, turned-down smile, and Hugh, though not enthusiastic, did not seem surprised. I saw that the proposal had been planned, and this told me in a flash that Hugh and Lady Mendel must have had some private talk about me since I saw him last. She had probably put questions and he had answered; or else he had volunteered the information that he cared for me. No doubt she had shown sisterly interest, and asked him to give her time for a good talk with his love. He did not entirely trust her, I knew, but if she had appeared sympathetic, he could hardly refuse such a reasonable request.

"It is coming," I said to myself, as Hugh and Lady Kathleen turned away. I could hear my heart beating, yet I was no longer frightened. I hoped Hugh would not take the girl to our arbour. I wondered if Sarah were in her room, sitting behind the window curtain, and if she could hear our conversation. I almost hoped she could, because, if my presentiment were right, I should be saved the pain of telling the story.

"I'm so pleased to be able to have a talk with

you, quite by ourselves," Lady Mendel began. "I've been hearing so much about you from my brother." She waited a second or two, to see if I would speak; but when I did not, she went on, in her clear, level voice, with so slight a hesitation in choosing words, that it seemed she must have rehearsed the scene in her mind, getting her part in it by heart. "I do hope you won't think I'm too dreadfully abrupt, in beginning such a subject, but there's so little time, isn't there? And there's so much I want to say—so much I must say. May I go on, Mrs.—Lippincott?"

"Please do," I said.

"Well—I am years older than Hugh, and as our mother died when he was a boy, I've always tried to do my best by him, in every way. I felt there was something *odd* about his not coming home, for one *doesn't* stop in Granada in summer, does one? Oh, it's different with you, of course. You have your villa and garden—but my brother—I wrote to him several times, saying if he were ill he must let me know, and I'd come out to him, no matter how hot. He always insisted he was well, and enjoying his rest. But I felt there was something. And then I begged him to meet me in Paris, where I was with Kathleen. He didn't even answer—so that's why I came. As for Kathleen—her father's gone to Canada. I couldn't leave the dear child behind. She feels she's in a false position—but that can't interest you. Still, it was rather awkward for us both in the Generalife gardens. It was almost as if we came to spy on my brother—though I assure you it was an accident. He saw that—from my point of view—and perhaps from yours. Before dinner this evening he came to my room and told me of—

your great friendship, and—that he'd asked you to marry him."

"Then," I answered in a voice which would not rise much above a whisper, "he must have told you at the same time that I—that I—have not said yes."

"He did tell me that," replied Lady Mendel, lowering her tones also. "If not—that is, if he had told me the opposite—I should have felt obliged to say something which—would have been unpleasant for us both. As it was, I said nothing. I assure you of that. Already I'd begged him to bring us to see you—and the garden, of course. That was a good excuse. When he told me of his feeling for you, the visit was arranged, so I offered no objections. I simply waited. And I asked him to give me a chance for making your acquaintance—you and I alone together for a few minutes."

"I thought it must have been so," I murmured.

"It won't be long—so it's the more difficult. But—you know when I first saw you this afternoon—I felt—it seemed as if I must have seen you before somewhere."

Ever since she came into the garden Lady Mendel's worldly-looking eyes under the large lids had fixed themselves on my face whenever possible. They told me what she was going to say before her lips said it: if the news had needed to be broken. I knew that I did not flush or turn pale. I met her eyes steadily, not defiantly, but gravely, with a question.

"I couldn't be sure then," she began once more, "but—frankly, I must confess, Mrs. Lippincott, that instinct told me to associate the likeness with something—er—something *notorious*."

Perhaps she expected me to break into angry words, but she did not appear relieved of any fear by my

silence. No doubt she had prepared herself to deal with an outburst.

"Of course, I wasn't so indiscreet as to speak of my idea—to my brother," she assured me. "He has been away so much in the East, for years and years, that I was certain he—but I *did* ask Kathleen if your face struck her as at all *familiar*, and she had the same impression I had, though more vague. That was one reason why I felt I must meet you again—at once, before more harm could be done. It was only when Hugh came to my room after seeing you for the second time and began telling me of his feeling for you, that suddenly, in the most extraordinary way, like a kind of *flash*, I remembered." She paused an instant, then said more impressively: "I remembered who you were. I know I'm not mistaken. Though I never saw you before, nobody who read the newspapers could help recognising you from the photographs. And it's only a few months ago—I saw them the first time they appeared, too, of course—but it's so long since then, I might have forgotten. I suppose these were the same, published again: they looked old-fashioned. But you've changed singularly little, when one realises what you——"

"Oh, please, Lady Mendel, need we talk of that?" I could not help imploring, though the instant the words were out, I wished them unspoken. I wished that I could have ended with her as I had begun, seemingly a stoic.

"Forgive me," she said politely. "I was carried on without thinking. Of course, I don't want to hurt you more than can be helped. It's all so painful. My heart really breaks for my poor brother. It will be such a terrible disillusionment to him—a man of ideals, as he is."

"He knows there is something," I said. In spite of myself my voice sounded humble. "He knows that's why I can't marry him."

"Ah, I suppose, poor fellow, he has a vague idea of a 'past,' such as women have in plays or novels. Hugh is so romantic. But this—Mrs. Lippincott, you must tell him who you are, and everything, or I shall have to. And it will be so much better for us *all*, to have it come from you. That's why I called; for when I remembered *quite* distinctly the photographs, I should have made an excuse of being tired, if I hadn't felt it my bounden duty to have this talk with you, personally. I want you to tell Hugh *to-night*, Mrs. Lippincott, after I have taken Kathleen—poor little Kathleen!—back to the hotel. Because, if you're really fond of him, you must see that the best thing—the only thing—is for him to go away with us. If I could get him off to-morrow morning for Gibraltar, I should be thankful."

"I do see that it would be best," I said. "But you misunderstand some things, I think, Lady Mendel. I didn't tell Hugh—about myself, because there was never, never any idea in my mind of marrying him. I do love him——" I was ashamed because my voice would break—"I love him a thousand times too well to hurt him now or in the future. I tried to send him away, but—he wanted to stay—just a little while. And we tried being friends. To-day was to be the last—his birthday. He didn't know—but I'd made up my mind not to let him come again. I meant to write a letter and tell him he must go. Then you came—and we hadn't said good-bye—and I *had* to see him just once, to find out whether you—had told him anything. Of course, I thought about the photographs. That's why I wanted to live quietly where

I needn't wear a veil always, as I did in England if I went out. And this garden seemed a place of peace. But I realise now there can be no peace. If it hadn't been that you asked to call, I shouldn't have let Hugh come to me again. And he would soon have gone away if I'd told him in a letter that I should have to live shut up in the garden till after he went. He would have understood that—that it was ended. Now you know why there was no need for me to tell him, and make him sick at heart."

"I don't know that," Lady Mendel said sharply. "Quite the contrary. If you won't tell him, I shall have to, that's all."

"But why—why?"

"For one thing, you might change your mind, and yield to temptation; for though Hugh is my brother, I can see that he is extraordinarily attractive to women. And to a woman whom he loves—and who loves him, as you say you do, I should think he must be irresistible."

"I swear to you I won't change my mind. Nothing could make me change it."

"Hugh could make you change it. He is very determined, and when he wants a thing he wants it so much that he moves heaven and earth to get it. Unfortunately, he wants very much to marry you."

"But when he knows it's impossible——"

"He'll still go on wanting it. I see and admit that you are a woman a man wouldn't easily forget, especially such a man as Hugh, unless he had a sudden revulsion of feeling which tore the love out of his heart."

"Oh!" I cried, as if she had struck me. For impassable as I knew the barrier to be, I had not

quite realised until I heard it from her how revolting I must be if the truth were known. I had hated the thought of telling Hugh, partly because it would be terribly painful to him, but partly, too, because I had imagined it not quite impossible that he would want to marry me in spite of all. And then I should find it still more difficult to resist him. Because I had lived face to face with the horror so long, I had not understood thoroughly that it would turn me into a leper in Hugh's dear eyes, as his sister took for granted.

Thoughts roared in my ears like thunder. I forgot to answer, and I heard Lady Mendel continuing her arguments. Her voice sounded far away.

"Even if he consented to go, he would always be regretting you," she said. "The memory of you in your high-walled garden would remain in his mind like a portrait in a beautiful frame. Yes, that is just it—a portrait in a beautiful frame. And it won't *do!*"

"The poor portrait has been skied in life's picture gallery!" I heard myself cry out, bitterly. "Now, it's stored away for ever in the world's lumber-room, with its face to the wall."

"Don't feel like that about yourself," said Lady Mendel. "I am most sorry to distress you. But what can I do? And there are many occupations left for you on this earth. Slum work, for instance—in any country—except *England*, naturally, and perhaps America, where it would be disagreeable to be constantly recognised. Maybe the people—er—might resent—that class is so ungrateful. But still, there are many consolations, I am sure. And if you have the courage to save Hugh by telling him, you will have the reward of——"

"Save Hugh by telling him!" I echoed. "Are you very, *very* sure that he would look upon me as being so—horrible?"

"I am *quite* sure," she answered promptly, "that neither Hugh nor any other man would feel the slightest temptation to make you his wife—knowing who you are."

"But he might believe in me."

"There would always be the *doubt*. That would be enough to send a shudder through his heart at the most passionate moment, Mrs. Lippincott. And when a shudder goes through a man's heart at the thought of a woman it kills love."

"Oh, you are cruel!" I stammered.

"If I'm cruel to you, it's in order to make you kind to my brother. I assure you again, if I allowed you simply to send him away, without telling him what is the real obstacle between you, even if he bowed to your decision, his life would be ruined. He would be haunted by you and your mystery. He would never be able to turn his thoughts to anything or anyone else. Not only would he lose interest in his career, which is so promising, and forget his ambition, but he would lose interest in life. I know him better than you do, you see! There would be no home ties for him: no sweet, innocent young wife: no little children to console him. Whereas, if you tell him the truth to-night, there will be one short, sharp pang, and the thing will be *over*."

"Oh, my God!" I heard someone saying, and knew that it was I. My head was bowed down into my hands, and I forgot that I had hoped to seem a stoic. I did not look up at Lady Mendel, but somehow I felt that my agony had frightened her. I heard the

soft swish of her satin dress as she rose from the low chair which she had drawn close to mine.

"Do compose yourself," she murmured, laying her hand on my shoulder. "I think they're coming back. You wouldn't like Hugh to see—to know—and I shouldn't. This is not the time. And it would be so dreadful, before Kathleen. She hated coming—but I made her—so there would be someone to take Hugh away from us. If you're determined not to tell Hugh yourself—I must do it; but I should have thought you would prefer—and it will be so long drawn out, because he won't believe at first. We shall all be tortured——"

"I will tell him," I said, lifting my head and rising to stand by Lady Mendel. "I see that you are right. It was stupid of me not to realise before—but he shall know, and—and as you say, it will be over."

"They *are* coming!" exclaimed Lady Mendel. "Will you tell him to-night?"

"Yes."

"I may depend upon you?"

"I promise. If he comes back——"

"I will send him," said Lady Mendel, briskly. "He can take Kathleen and me to the door of the hotel, and return at once. It shall be settled before we leave the garden. I'll think of something to say. While he is with you, I'll speak to the hotel people about going to-morrow. When it's all over, Hugh will be thankful to have everything arranged—and to get away."

"Yes, he'll be thankful," I heard myself saying.

And as the merciful darkness had fallen, he could not see my face when he came near. By keeping silent under cover of Lady Mendel's talk, I was safe.

CHAPTER XII

"HUGH, Mrs. Lippincott has kindly promised to look up a book for me," said Lady Mendel at last. "Will you come back when you've dropped us at the hotel, and ask her if she's found it?"

The excuse was as good as any other. She was willing Hugh should think that she was seeking a pretext to send him back to me, and that he should be grateful—for a little while.

From the Carmen de Santa Catalina it was not more than ten minutes' walk to the hotel. Hugh would come to me again in twenty minutes, and I would tell him the thing which must make him hate me.

I did not try to prepare, or think what I should say first, or wonder how I could make myself seem less terrible to him than Lady Mendel believed I should seem. Besides, according to her the way to save him was to show myself at the worst.

When they had gone, I felt extraordinarily tired, as if I had been battered by waves in a high sea. I had a physical longing, almost a necessity, to lie down, and stretch myself out flat; but it seemed, if I yielded to this craving, I should never have the courage or strength to get up again.

I had not gone to the gate with my visitors, but had bidden them good-bye standing on the terrace, and then, for fear Sarah might come down or call

me when the garden was quiet, I walked quickly and softly away to the arbour of the fountain. I knew that if Sarah found me gone, she would understand, and leave me alone, even if she had overheard something and suspected more. As for Hugh, not seeing me on the terrace or in the dimly lighted drawing-room, he would soon look for me in my favourite resting place. It was usually taken for granted between us that, if I were not on the terrace, I would be there.

When by and bye I heard his footsteps coming fast, along the path to the arbour, as if he were in a hurry, I had not thought of anything at all, except that I would have to make him turn from me with repulsion.

"Nita—are you in the arbour?" he called to me in a low voice before he reached the doorway.

"Yes, I'm here—waiting for you," I answered.

He came in, and I could see only him as a shadow, for now it was night, and under the heavy vines and creepers very dark.

"I can just catch the glimmer of your white dress," he said. "You look like a ghost. But——" and finding his way to me he took my hand—"you don't feel like one, dear, beautiful, beloved woman. Oh, how glorious to come back to you, and have you to myself! I didn't dream of any such good luck. It's a splendid ending for my birthday, after all."

His birthday . . . My poor Hugh! . . .

"Is there really a book for my sister?" he inquired.

"Or was it just a kind excuse to let me say good-night to you? By Jove, I hadn't given Beatrice credit for being such a decent chap. I believe I'll take to calling her 'Bee' after this. You know I

told her about us: that I worshipped the ground you walked on, and that I meant to get you for my wife in spite of your 'No.' She was quite sympathetic—for her. But I took her sympathy with a grain of salt, until she sent me back—for the book. How did you get on together?"

"Very well," I answered mechanically. The words of the story I would have to tell began drumming in my ears.

"I hung about with Kathleen as long as I could, because I'd promised—and Beatrice seemed to want to be kind, according to her lights. Only I kept thinking—what if she'd fooled me, and was trying to play me some trick?—like a dastardly cat. Heaven alone knows what I talked about to that girl. I must have bored her badly. She behaved like a lump. Of course, you knew I wouldn't bring her into the arbour—*our* arbour—where we've been so happy?"

"We've been unhappy, too," I said. "At least, I have."

"I think you caused me some qualms here, once or twice, but I deserved them, perhaps; and you've atoned for them all, my darling, since then, so they're forgotten."

"And now I have to make you unhappy in a way you don't deserve, and I can never atone for!" I said. "But I hope and pray you will forget—the unhappiness and me too."

"I can't have you being melodramatic, sweet," he laughed, "and you may as well understand that I won't let you make me unhappy, and I never intend to be far enough away to forget. Dearest, why do you shiver? Your hand is suddenly like ice." He found and took the other. "And this one is just

as bad. I must warm them—since the July night can't." He lifted both my hands to his lips, but before his mouth touched them, I slipped them away.

"Don't kiss even my hands to-night, dear," I said to him very softly. "Not that I don't want you to, but because afterwards you may shiver as I did a minute ago, thinking how you'd kissed them just before—just before I told you something I'm going to tell now."

"What are you going to tell?" he asked, almost sharply. "Have I made you understand, I wonder, that I don't want to hear anything you don't want to tell? It's your present and future I'm particularly concerned with, not your past."

"I've changed my mind," I answered. "I do want to tell you."

"Very well," he said. "I wish you would change your mind about other things as easily; but I shall make you do that. Tell me, dearest one on earth or in heaven, just what you wish to tell me and no more; and let me kneel down here at your feet, with your head on my heart while you tell—whatever it is."

Before I could stop him he was on his knees, his arms round me, drawing me gently but firmly towards him. As gently but as firmly too, I held him back with both my hands on his breast, so that he could bring me no nearer without using force that would hurt.

"Listen, Hugh," I began, "have you ever wondered why I wear my hair short?"

"It isn't really short," he said, "and it goes all into waves and lovely soft rings. Every woman would wear her hair short if it could be like that. I supposed

you did so because it was pretty and quaint, fastened with those pins and tortoise-shell buckles. Besides, Miss Nelson told me you'd been very ill—not even expected to live, so of course your hair had to be cut—”

“I used to come nearly down to my knees. But—it was cut long before I was ill,” I said in a mumbling voice, because my tongue and lips were so dry it was hard to speak at all. “Ten years before. It was cut—in prison.”

That took him out of himself. I understood so well how he had believed that nothing I could say would startle him, that nothing could ruffle the deep calm of his love; but those two words—“in prison”—spoken of myself—were the words of all others he had not schooled himself to expect. They stung like a whip, and made him cry out, “Good God!” Then he crushed me tighter, not thinking whether or no he might hurt my resisting arms. He seemed to snatch me from the world which marched an army against the woman he would defend. I felt the anguish in him run through me like fire, and the passion of his sorrow because I had not always had the defence of his arms. But he knew only the beginning yet; and because of the change that must come in him when he heard the rest, even in his arms I felt weak, as though my flesh were frail as flower petals, beaten by a storm. For he could not defend me against the revolt of his own soul. As this was the beginning, so that would be the end.

“I was in prison ten years,” I told him.

He drew in a breath like a sob. “God, what devils men are! I'd give my life to have stamped out their lives, all who put you there—and kept you there—my white dove.”

"I was put there for that," I blundered on somehow—"because they accused me of taking—a life. But they had just enough doubt—not to hang me. I should have been in prison now—and as long as I lived, only for Sarah—what she did for me—and because I was dying—so it seemed to them I might as well come out to die. Then Sarah saved me again. She wouldn't let me die. She is Sarah Nicholls really, not Nelson. Now—do you know who I am—what woman it is you have loved, and kissed?"

"I only know," he said, "that it's the woman I love still—just as much—more—for what she's suffered unjustly. Ten years! How shall I make up to you for them?"

"How good you are, how good!" I breathed to him. "You believe in me without—asking one question. My darling, the only way I can reward you is to end this as soon as I can, and tell you without need of questions. I was Anita Durrand. You didn't dream it would be as terrible as that—the thing I had to tell? Oh, Hugh—let me go! I know it is making you sick—sick to have me in your arms, but you keep me for pity—you can't bear that I should know!" My voice rose in a shrill and sharp, then broke. I struggled to escape, and release him from the bonds of his own loyalty. But where was the horror of me which Lady Merdel had predicted with confidence? If he felt it, he concealed it well and bravely. Still, he did not know the worst yet.

"It is terrible," he agreed; "more terrible than I thought, but for you, dearest—not for me; except to think of the cruelty—and I am not there to save you or bear it for you. Why, don't you see, I want a thousand times more than ever to take you for mine,

so as to make all the years to come happy enough to blot out the past? Ten years! Why, I'll make you look back on them as an ugly minute—or, better still, wipe them out of your memory."

"I didn't suppose there could be men like you in the world," I said. "It's worth everything to have met one—and to have had his love! But even yours can't live on the rocks where I must dash it, Hugh. You're hardly in sight of them yet. I think the mist of your own goodness hides them. Tell me this, and answer truly. Don't keep anything back, for both our sakes. You read the trial of Anita Durrand?"

"No, thank heaven, I didn't," he answered, unhesitating. "I hate and loathe murder cases in the papers—always did, from a boy, for the same reason that I saw red whenever there was any worrying of rats with terriers, which some chaps called sport. The thought of a defenceless thing at the mercy of something bigger and stronger than itself always made me wild."

"Even if the defenceless thing was evil, and had killed in its turn?"

"Yes, even then. How people can swallow such doses in the papers, with their breakfasts! They must have the blood and sensibility of toads."

"But surely," I insisted, "you knew about the case. You heard people talk of it—express their opinions? Half England wanted me—hanged."

"Don't!" he begged. "I can't stand it!"

Still he held me close, and would not let me go. I had ceased to try, for I thought that in a few minutes more the words I had to say would be like a steel key to unlock the warm clasp.

"You did know, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, I knew—to a certain extent," he replied almost angrily, his tone that of a man who is suffering bodily pain. "Some things are in the air. You can't avoid them."

"And didn't you—unconsciously perhaps—form an opinion that the woman was guilty?"

"Woman! Why, you were a child. Ten years ago you were barely nineteen."

"That isn't an answer. But I know what it means all the same, my poor Hugh. You did think she was guilty."

"I thought very little about it. If you were a child, I wasn't much more than a boy—it seems now—twenty-one. I had just got into the army. I was like most fellows of my age, taken up with my own concerns. I wasn't even in England then; I was on the way out to India at the time, I remember now——"

"Ah! what makes you remember particularly?"

"It comes back to me that people were—were talking on the ship. Cooped up like that, one had to listen sometimes—at the table or in the smoking-room—and all that."

"You *must* tell me what you thought of—the woman you heard your friends call—a murderess. If you refuse, I shall only believe it perhaps worse than it was."

"I suppose I took my opinion more or less from those around me. But if I'd read the case, Nita—or seen your picture, as some of the others had—I remember they said you were beautiful and young—I should have had the sense and decency to think for myself. I should have known you were innocent. God! I wish I could have fought for you!"

"But——" and now the supreme moment had come —"what if I—were not innocent?"

I felt his blood leap and his muscles contract as a man's must in the electric chair. For an instant he was dumb. The plashing of the fountain seemed suddenly very loud. It wept for the death of love. The drip of its tears was cold in my heart. In the dark we could not see each other's faces, or it would have been harder to go on, sentence by sentence, telling him these things, poisoning his ideal with deadly acid. But suddenly I knew that he had lifted his head, and was seeking my eyes. I felt his breath on my hair.

"If you swore to me that you were not innocent, I shouldn't believe you!" he said. And his arms did not loose me yet.

CHAPTER XIII

STILL there was more to come. And I was not trying to test him. I was telling my story as best I could, fragment by fragment, until he should know of me all that I knew of myself.

I longed to bend forward, and kiss his hair in my gratitude, but there was no fire of passion in me now, to carry me away and make me forget my unworthiness, as I had forgotten in the afternoon. Face to face with the reconstructed image of my old self, I did not understand how I had offered my body or my soul to him in any way, with the idea that my nearness, without a legal tie, could not hurt him.

"It's no use trying to thank you, Hugh, for what you say, for what you are—to me," I sighed. "It goes far beyond words—as far and high as heaven is. But, could you bear to listen if I told you the story from the beginning? I should like to tell you, if you could—go through it with me."

"Let me live it through with you," he answered.

"It's a long story, if I go back to the place where I want to begin. I can't have you like that on your knees before me, while I tell you. It isn't right—and you will be so tired."

"I'll stay as I am, dearest," he insisted.

And so I began to make pictures for him of what my life had been: just a few of my childhood, and

of my mother: then of the convent: but only quick sketches until I came to the time when mother had me join her in Paris.

"I was seventeen," I said, "but older than most of the girls at school. The Superior wrote that it was time for me to be taken away—so Mother sent Sarah. Sarah was her maid just then—but it was me Sarah loved. And I loved her. Mother had a flat, and knew lots of people, who used to come there on her 'day'—and she was asked everywhere. She was beautiful. She looked almost as young as I, and loved to be admired. She didn't like having a daughter taller than herself. People were surprised, if they saw me and asked who I was—but I wasn't supposed to be 'out.' I think Mother lived extravagantly, for she wasn't rich—and there was some disappointment about a French Marquis she cared for, who couldn't marry her when he found out how little money she had. I have all that's left of it now, and it's less than two hundred pounds a year. Perhaps she had about twice as much then. Anyhow, she was worried how to make ends meet, and have pretty things. I didn't understand about helping her as I ought, or she might have grown fonder of me. But there was a man who used to call on her sometimes, who met me one day with Sarah as I was coming upstairs from a walk. He knew Sarah by sight, and stopped her to ask who I was. It surprised him to hear that I was Mrs. Duprez's daughter. His name was Durrand—Woodruffe Durrand, and he lived in England—but of course you know that; and how he had a house in London, and a moor in Scotland, and a flat in Paris, and turned out to be a money-lender who did all his business under another name. People hadn't discovered that secret then. But

Mother knew he was rich, and liked young girls. I'm afraid that was the real reason she answered the Superior's letter by taking me out of the convent so quickly.

"After the morning he met us on the stairs, Mr. Durrand came nearly every day, though Sarah said he hadn't been very often before; and Mother made me entertain him, although it bored me dreadfully and I couldn't think what to say to an old man. He wasn't so very old really—not more than fifty-six or seven, but he never took any exercise, and liked eating, so he'd grown fat, with a bulging sort of figure, and cheeks and chin that hung down over his collar. His hair was not gray, but black, and so was his moustache—a bluish black that I used to think looked like stove polish—but they were thin, and the bald part of his head was yellow, like his face. His nose was large, and he was always patting it with his silk handkerchief soaked in some strong perfume; and I couldn't help seeing that a little black came off his moustache on the white silk. But, although he was fat and ugly, he dressed very well, and cared a great deal about his clothes. I hardly ever saw him in the same things twice. Sarah believed that he wanted to marry Mother, but I was sure she'd never accept; she liked handsome people. So you can think whether I was surprised when Mother told me one night that Mr. Durrand had proposed for me. I thought she was joking—a horrid sort of joke—at first, but soon I saw it was deadly earnest. She cried and sobbed, and said she didn't know what would become of us if I refused—we couldn't go on living as we were, and she would have to kill herself, or worse. All night she stayed in my room, begging me to say yes, and telling me how

happy I should make her—and that it was better marrying an old man than a young one, if you didn't love him, because you could do as you pleased. She said he'd be good to us both, and generous, and her troubles would be over. And, best of all, she said she would love me dearly. I had always longed for her love so much! She was so beautiful, with such wonderful, soft eyes, and sang old songs in such a lovely voice that it called my heart out of my body. Only she never wanted it!

"Before morning I promised to do what she begged me to do; then everything was hurried up quickly, or even for her sake I don't believe I should have been able to keep my word. Mr. Durrand had to go back to England soon, and he wanted to be married and—and have a short honeymoon on the Italian Lakes first. That was a bribe to me—to see the Italian Lakes. I'd always longed to. My best friend at the convent lived on Lake Como. And Mr. Durrand did nothing to frighten me. He was just polite and kind as he had been before, and gave me a diamond and emerald ring—an antique. He was a great judge of antiques. He talked to me about his house in London, and what a good time I should have there, and how I should love Scotland. He didn't tell me he'd been married before when he was young, and had a daughter years older than I. Not that it would have made any difference.

"Just as soon as it could be managed legally, we had the marriage—the civil one first; and that day I began to feel as if I couldn't go on. I cried and was horribly unhappy that night, and Mother had to promise I should have Sarah for my maid, to take to the Lakes and to England, or else I should have refused to go on with the religious part of the

marriage. I remember, before I could sleep, Mother gave me a huge dose of bromide or something, and the next day I felt dazed and strange. I didn't seem to care what happened, and I had a sick headache for the first time in my life.

"We started away two hours after the wedding—Mr. Durrand and Sarah and I, and his valet. He—Mr. Durrand—began wanting me to call him 'Sam,' and I said I couldn't; I should have to go on calling him Mr. Durrand. He was angry, and there was a look in his eyes that made me a little afraid. I got to know it very well afterwards.

"We didn't travel far that day. We went only to an hotel at St. Germain, which seemed to me beautiful. I'd never been in an hotel before, since I was a little girl, just after Mother brought me away from down South, so I was dying to have dinner in the big restaurant, to look at all the people, and the lovely view from the window. But he wouldn't consent to that. He said he wanted me to himself. We had a private sitting-room, and he ordered dinner there.

"I couldn't say anything about that scene to you, only it had a great influence on the—case, afterwards—just a year afterwards. You didn't read the papers, so you won't remember. The only thing I need tell you is, that he frightened and disgusted me dreadfully, and I screamed, and tried to run out into the hall. But he laughed, and locked the door, while he held my wrists, and his teeth were so big and yellow he was like the ogre in fairy stories Sarah used to read to me when she was my nurse. He called me a little devil, and said I was making him feel a young man. I twisted myself away, and then—because I was really afraid, truly thinking he must

have gone out of his mind, I lost my head in a sort of panic. I seized a glass full of champagne, and threw it straight at him as he stood in front of the door. I didn't know what I was doing—I was so frantic at being alone with such a man—and married to him. The wine-glass struck him on the chin, and broke. The champagne went all over his white shirt front, mingling with a little blood from the cuts the glass made.

"I covered my eyes with my hands and shrieked when I saw what I had done. He started to come towards me again—I think in his rage he meant to strike—but he began to stagger, and then, though he tried to save himself by seizing a chair, he fell and rolled over on his side. His eyes were wide open, but they went up into his head, showing only the whites, and I thought I had killed him. The key of the door was in his pocket, and I would have jumped out of the window sooner than touch him to find it; so I only screamed for help. And at last they broke the door down. His valet was one of the first in the room: an Englishman who didn't like me at all, or want his master to marry anyone. He asked me what I had done, and I said I'd thrown a wine-glass at Mr. Durrand because I was angry.

"They sent for a doctor, and it turned out that the glass or the fall hadn't done much harm, but the excitement had caused a fit of some kind. Mr. Durrand wasn't strong, and there was too much fat round the heart, it seemed. He was very ill there at St. Germain, a long time. The wedding trip was given up; and it was weeks before we were able to travel to London. I hoped he would let me go away, but he wouldn't—and Mother couldn't have taken me back.

She was travelling in Italy with friends, and had let her flat.

"You don't remember, I suppose, what he said at the trial—but you can imagine what the valet made of that scene, when he was called as a witness against me a year later. It was perfectly true that Mr. Durrand was never the same man again after the fit he had; it was perhaps my fault, for exciting him, and dashing the wine-glass at his face. But it wasn't my fault in the way Burton made it out. He swore that I was like a mad fiend, when he found me in the room, and his master on the floor covered with blood. And he lied when he said in court that I screamed, 'I hope he is dead!' I may have cried out that I was 'afraid' he was dead—for I *was* afraid, and sick at heart with a cold, guilty feeling. I forgot how terrible Mr. Durrand had been to me in my fear that I'd killed him. And although I must have begun to hate him even then, without quite knowing it, I'm sure I would have given my life to save his at that minute.

"His own doctor was sent for from London to come to St. Germain; and he travelled back to England with us, and always attended Mr. Durrand afterward. When he was called as a witness in the trial, he had to say that his patient had never been strong after the fit, and illness, at St. Germain; but he wasn't against me, as Burton was. I know Burton was sorry I wasn't hanged. And if it hadn't been for him and the lies he told about my life, the things he twisted into wrong meanings, I think I should have been acquitted.

"I had such a sense of guilt when I saw Mr. Durrand ill and feeble that I tried to be gentle and good, after he'd refused to let me go away. He kept

me with him a great deal, when he was getting better, but wasn't allowed to leave his room—that was after he'd been taken to London, to the great big house where I spent that awful year of being married. He liked me to read aloud—he had a library full of splendid books, and loved them. That was the best thing about him—and his love of music. Whenever I happened to glance up from a page, I almost always found him watching me, with a queer, brooding sort of look; but when he caught my eyes, he turned his away, or shut them, and pretended to be asleep.

"I hoped he would get well, of course—yet I dreaded the time. When he began to creep about, he made me help him—and Burton was jealous—but, oh, I forgot to tell you, the daughter I didn't know about, used to come and see her father when he was ill. She married someone he didn't like, and he'd never forgiven her—still, he didn't seem to mind seeing her when there was nothing he wanted to do. Her husband had lost a lot of money—and Mr. Durrand wouldn't give her any. But I found out afterwards that she'd hoped always he would leave her everything, and so she was dreadfully upset when he married. She couldn't bear me, and it amused her father to try and pit us against each other. She was rather common, because Mr. Durrand had married when he was quite young, before he was rich, a woman of his own class; but he, being very intelligent and fond of having beautiful things round him, rose above it. Though he was so ugly to look at, he seemed hardly common at all—except when he was angry, or in a mood to say coarse things. Mrs. Frenshaw—the daughter—was like her mother, and being poor had got into a different set of people from her father's. She lived in Clapham—but she used to come often to

Eaton Square, till Mr. Durrand was well, and they had a quarrel about her husband and children, whom he wouldn't have in the house.

"One day when he was strong enough to go to his business, which I knew vaguely was somewhere in the City, he came home in the evening acting rather strangely. Afterwards it turned out that he had been drinking a good deal of port, which he'd been told never to touch. He called me to his room—mine was next to it—and tried to kiss me, and frightened me again; but I must have looked at him with a terrible look, for he shrank away as if he thought I would throw something at him again or stab him. He rang for his valet, but when Burton came, he only asked for his medicine, still I saw the man suspected something. Mr. Durrand wouldn't let me go, but when he had taken the medicine and sent Burton away, he called me a great many horrible names I had never heard before, and said it was the same as if I had murdered him. Because of the attack my cruelty had brought on the day we were married, his doctor had told him that any excitement might kill him, in a moment.

"'You did it on purpose, so you could live on my money, and I could never make love to you again for fear of falling dead,' he yelled at me. And Burton must have been listening at the door, because he knocked and opened it instantly, saying, 'Did you call me, sir?'

"I think Mr. Durrand's great pleasure was in punishing me, after that, in all the ways he thought I should hate most. He promised to help my mother pay her debts, but he wrote a letter which he showed me, saying she'd given him such a young devil for a wife she couldn't expect any payment. He hadn't

bargained for what'd he got. I never had a penny of my own to spend. He made me wear handsome dresses, too rich and old for a girl of eighteen, but the bills came to him. I couldn't even buy a book, and when he found out that I loved books, he locked the library and kept the key. He gave dinners and I had to write the invitations, but to his friends, not to mine. I wasn't allowed to make friends—and the few I had, girls I'd known at school, or their brothers, he wouldn't let me see. I wanted me to wear his first wife's jewellery, and when I wouldn't, he boxed my ears—and grew so excited, Burton and the medicine had to be sent for. Once, when his daughter, Florence Frenshaw, came crying to me, begging me to get her a hundred pounds somehow, I took off my engagement ring and gave it to her. I hated wearing it, so it was no sacrifice, but I got into awful trouble. Her father accused me of selling it—and Florence never told him. I couldn't. I was afraid of what he might do to her. And I grew a coward for myself, too—it was so dreadful always having storms, and being afraid he might fall down in a fit. If ever I had any little pleasure, like meeting a friend by accident, or receiving a present—my Browning, for instance, which I have to this day—I got into the habit of fibbing, rather than he should find out. I was like Nora with the macaroons, in 'The Doll's House.'

"Things went on like that for a year, until one day he came home unexpectedly much earlier than usual, and found an old friend of mine with me in the drawing-room—I had no boudoir. It was a young man, named Willie Mackinnon—a silly boy, more like a nice girl than a man, though once for a few weeks, in a vacation from the convent, when I was fourteen,

I was in love with him. I wrote about him in my diary. But he had grown up without a chin. He was just better than nobody, because he reminded me of old times. It was his cousin—the girl who lived on Lake Como—who gave me the Browning; and he hadn't been in London very long that day when he called. I think, though, Burton must have heard me tell Sarah that Willy would call, and have telephoned his master to come and find us together.

"There was no scene, till Willie had gone—but he went soon, because Mr. Durrand glared, and was grumpy. But afterwards—if you'd read the trial I shouldn't have to tell you all this. Yet—perhaps I *should* want to tell you just as it really happened, not as it sounded in the papers, when Burton gave evidence about Willy coming secretly. And it went against me, that he and I had known each other a long time. Afterwards the scene came, when Willy had got safely out of the house. Then things were almost as bad as at St. Germain, for Mr. Durrand was taken very ill again. Just because Burton had gone out on some errand, and wasn't there to help him, he seemed to think the man careless and ungrateful, and refused to take medicine from him. It was only a whim—but Burton was sullen about it, and later I found that he blamed me, thinking I had influenced his master. I suppose that is why Burton bore no grudge against Mr. Durrand. And now, Hugh, you know exactly what my life had been, before the horror that crushed me."

Hugh had listened, scarcely moving, and as I talked on, calling up those old ghosts of the past, to trail by me in the darkness, he shielded me from them with his arms.

"That fellow wasn't a man. He was a monster!"

he said, in a hard voice. "If you had killed him, I wouldn't have blamed you. But I know you didn't."

"Wait. Hear what happened," I went on. "This part that I'm going to tell you now was in none of the papers. It didn't come out at the trial. Only Sarah and I knew. I pleaded innocence—but listen."

"He—Mr. Durrand—had a relapse, and was almost as ill as before. Still, though he said to me more than once that I was the cause, he wanted me to nurse him. Perhaps—I've thought sometimes—he was afraid if he let me go for long out of his sight I might run away. He refused to have a professional nurse engaged, and Burton was allowed to do nothing but turn and lift him—heavy work that Sarah and I couldn't do. Afterwards Burton gave evidence that his master had said it was I who refused to have a nurse brought into the house. Sometimes Sarah sat up at night, sometimes I did, but I liked the night work better, because then he slept most of the time, and I could read, out of sight from the bed, with a green-shaded light. There was nothing much to do, but give him medicine—always the same kind, only stronger than when he was well. Sarah preferred the day work, for he didn't talk to her and grumble or nag as he did with me. Besides, dear Sarah's one fault is that she's a coward physically—not morally. In that way she's the bravest woman I ever knew. It was an old house, and there were lots of mice in it. Sometimes they came out at night, more in Mr. Durrand's room, it seemed, for some reason or other, than any in the house, and Sarah couldn't bear to sit there alone, with him asleep, for fear a mouse might run across her foot. Once one did—or she fancied it. And she gave a little squeak of fear, which waked Mr. Durrand out of a good sleep—so

after that I took all the night work. It was only a week before—the night.

"At first, the doctor had thought there was danger that he might die, but there was less anxiety that week, unless there should be a sudden turn for the worse. And—Oh, Hugh, I was *sorry* when I heard that! My heart sank. Things had been so dreadful, I didn't see how I was to go on when he got well again. I'm afraid I burst out with wicked words to Sarah, when I was nervous and tired. It was the morning before the dreadful thing happened—when Sarah had come to relieve me, and for a few minutes we had both left the sick-room in charge of Burton. I cried on her shoulder and said things—I hardly knew what—and she soothed me. Burton must have listened at the keyhole. At the trial he told in his evidence what I had said, and more that I didn't say. It couldn't have been very bad, really, or Mr. Durrand wouldn't have wanted me to come and sit by him again as usual, while he slept that night.

"I was good about keeping awake, generally. I would have a sleep the last thing; then Sarah would wake me, and give me a cup of strong coffee to keep me up through the six hours of watching. But that night, in spite of the coffee, I felt drowsy, almost from the first; I couldn't think why, for I'd done nothing to tire myself, and I was enthralled with 'The Ring and the Book.' I was reading it for the first time, and I'd just got to the most wonderful part. A strange coincidence that I should have been reading it just then. Mrs. Frenshaw found the volume lying open the next day at the place where I'd stopped reading. I'm sure she knew nothing about Browning, but she must have glanced at things on the page—and told her lawyer what she'd

seen; for in her evidence she contrived to bring it up, in a clever, damaging way she would never have thought of herself. It's the same Browning you've seen me reading. I found it in a trunk Sarah kept, and I wouldn't let myself be treacherous enough to hate the book for what wasn't its fault.

"I told you how much Mr. Durrand liked old things. All the furniture in the house was antique; and his bed was a four-poster, with heavy curtains. They were looped at the sides, to give air, but hung down at the head and foot. I sat when I watched by him at night at the foot of the bed, where the thick gray silk curtains made a screen between him and the green-shaded electric lamp on my little table. His medicine and a water carafe, and glasses and all sorts of things for an invalid, were on that table, too; and on a smaller table by the bedside, where he could reach it himself, nothing but a glass of water, and one of those tiny, fragile bottles to crush in a handkerchief if the heart is suddenly oppressed. The stuff in it is called amy^l, and it smells rather nice. Sarah has it, too. Isn't it strange, though she's so different—so thin and ascetic, and he was so fat and self-indulgent—she has some of the same symptoms that Mr. Durrand had? I could never dare say that to her, for she detested him, and it almost broke her heart that I should be married to such a man. He was old—and she wanted me to have a splendid, beautiful, young husband—like you. I believe she went on her knees to Mother the day I told her about Mr. Durrand; and she was so superstitious, poor darling, that she thought 'changing the name but not the letter' in marriage brought dreadful misfortune.

"When I grew too sleepy to read, that night, I

laid the book open on the table and tried to wake myself up by going softly to look, and make sure whether everything was right with Mr. Durrand. There was a dim, greenish gray light in the room, partly from my lamp and partly from a night lamp that he was fond of, even when he was well, for he hated sleeping in the dark, on account of burglars. It had a thick, dome-like shade, of some kind of glass, like opal, and it made a gray twilight that he thought soothing. The entire room was gray, except for the old mahogany furniture; gray wall-paper, gray curtains, gray carpet; and I had on a gray satin dressing-gown, edged with gray chinchilla. In a minute you'll see why I tell you all this, and how such a small detail has had an influence on my whole life.

"I had no kind, soft feeling of pity in my heart for Mr. Durrand as I stood by the bedside and stared at him in the gray light. He was asleep, with his mouth open, and I said to myself how disgusting he looked. I'd never thought of him as being *my husband*; I'd never used the word in speaking to him or of him. I couldn't have done it! Although he'd been so ill, he was fatter than ever, and with his muscles relaxed his face looked all loose and baggy under his yellow skin, that was gray in the gray light. His big body made a great lump under the cover, and those words of Shakespeare's jumped into my head, 'How like a swine he lies!' I felt rather ashamed of myself then, because it was as if I said something horrid behind his back—and I never had done that, except to Sarah—so I went to my chair again and sat down. He seemed so fast asleep, it would surely be a long time before he waked up—and the doctor's orders were not to disturb him for his medicine: good rest was

more important at night. I thought I might safely close my eyes for a few minutes, and doze off, as I was so drowsy. Then I should feel brighter afterwards. I felt certain of waking if he called, or even moved, because I'd got in the habit of sleeping lightly, as older people do.

"I began to dream about 'The Ring and the Book.' I seemed to be one of the characters, I couldn't tell which, and that worried me so dreadfully that I had the sensation of waking up. There I was, in the gray room, sitting with my head bent forward uncomfortably against the high back of the gray brocaded chair. The light was grayer than before, as if there were a faint mist before my eyes. I was not certain whether I was really awake, or whether I was dreaming that my eyes were open. I wanted to lift my hand and look at it. Then I could be sure; but just as I was trying to move, and couldn't, I saw a figure at the far end of the room. Its back was towards me. It was reaching up, doing something I couldn't make out. Then it turned, without the slightest sound, and I knew that it was *myself*.

"I stood, in my gray dressing-gown, with my hair hanging over my shoulders in two long braids. I was pouring something dark out of a queer-shaped bottle which I seemed to have seen somewhere before, and to know all about in a secret part of my brain, far under the surface of things. I was pouring the stuff into a glass. I wanted to look at the table by the chair, and see if it was Mr. Durrand's medicine glass, but I couldn't move my eyes from the gray figure that was mine, yet not mine. It was just as if I were frozen—or bound with ropes to the chair. I had a feeling that the other one had done something to keep me still, so I shouldn't interfere; yet through

it all a far-away, very small voice was saying, 'This is a nightmare. Wake up—wake up!'

"But I couldn't wake up; I could only watch the figure in the gray dressing-gown, flitting softly about like a big gray moth in the gray light. It came and looked at me in the chair, from a little distance: then, when it was satisfied that there was no danger of my calling out, it moved to the bed.

"From where I sat, I couldn't really have seen what it did next, if there had been such a figure, but in the dream I could see. It bent over the bed, and gently shook Mr. Durrand's shoulder, which showed above the cover. He waked up with a slight start, and I saw his eyes roll down in the white. He looked at the figure, as if he were dazed with sleep still. 'Take your medicine,' it whispered. It lifted up his head a little on its hand, as I always did, and made him drink all there was in the glass. Then it laid him carefully back on the pillow, and flitted away, gray in the gray light, till it came to the bathroom door, which stood ajar. There, it simply vanished; and in the dream this was the most terrible part, for I knew that it had killed Mr. Durrand, and now it would hide itself by getting back into my body again. The horror of waiting for it to come was so intense that it helped me to struggle. It was as if I broke something like a glass case that held me fast. I could hear it jingle in breaking, and I tore myself awake.

"Even then, when my eyes really were wide open, and my heart beating almost like the quick-firing of a machine gun, I hadn't the strength to move. I just sat, feeling sick and faint, with my hands on the arms of the chair. But I was so thankful to be out of the dream that nothing else mattered. After a long time—I don't know how long—I dragged myself

up, and went to look at Mr. Durrand. He lay asleep, as I had seen him before when I first put down my book; in the same position, with his mouth a little open.

"After that, the night wore on till six o'clock, and I wasn't surprised that he didn't wake to take his medicine, because the night before and all day he'd been restless. I thought it was the reaction. At half-past six, I suppose, Burton came to the door, as usual, to see if he were wanted; but I didn't hear him, for I'd gone to sleep—sound asleep, or I should have heard him come. The first thing I knew, he'd touched me on the shoulder. I jumped up, astonished.

"'I can't rouse Mr. Durrand,' he said, in a queer, scared voice.

"'Why do you want to rouse him?' I asked. 'He's not to be roused when he's asleep.'

"'He looks awful, that's why, and he's icy cold. I believe he's dead,' Burton answered.

"I rushed to the bed, and it was true. Even in the gray light—but it was brighter then, because it was April and a glimmer came through the curtains—I saw he had changed. Burton pushed back the curtains quickly—and the poor, dreadful face I'd thought so hideous—but I needn't tell you all that. I hardly remember what happened next. I can only remember feeling faint, and calling Sarah. Someone telephoned for the doctor, and he came soon. He lived not far away. He said Mr. Durrand must have been dead at least three hours; and he was very kind when I reproached myself for sleeping. One could tell that Mr. Durrand had passed quietly away without waking up or struggling for breath, he lay so peacefully. And the doctor reminded me that there'd always been a chance of heart failure. There would have been

no suspicion of anything else, and perhaps I should have forgotten my dream (I did forget it at first in the fright and confusion) if it hadn't been for Florence Frenshaw and Burton. They got together and talked it over, I suppose. Perhaps Burton told her what was in his mind. Anyhow, she insisted on a post-mortem examination—indeed, she almost accused me in so many words of poisoning her father because I'd hated him from the first. And she told what Burton had overheard me say to Sarah, that I didn't know how to bear my life because he was getting better and everything would go on as before. There was idiotic talk about Willy Mackinnon, who'd gone to America—and all Mr. Durrand's money being left to me. Burton thought I'd 'meant to do it from the first,' and influenced his master not to have anyone but me sit in the room at night. I can't tell you what I went through in that house the day of the post-mortem examination—when they found morphia in the body—enough to have caused death."

"Why didn't someone accuse the beast Burton of poisoning him?" Hugh broke out indignantly, as if he could no longer keep silent. "He came into the room while you were asleep. If he could do that at half-past six without waking you, he could have done it in the night. And there was motive—a grudge against his master for ingratitude, and jealousy of you."

"No, there was no motive, dear," I said. "Burton had very large wages, and his master often gave him presents. There was nothing left him in the will. He knew there would be nothing, for him or for any of the servants. It was a whim of Mr. Durrand's to make his servants look after him well, paying splendid wages, but warning them to expect not a penny

after his death. I was the only one who wanted him to die. But if it hadn't been for the *gray dream* I could have borne everything, and fought for my life, with a brave heart. It was the dream that made it most horrible—the secret thought that while I was pleading my innocence and being defended, maybe I—I had—in my sleep—done the thing I saw the gray figure do. Even the years in prison would not have been such torture—without the dream. I was always having it again. I was afraid to go to sleep. Just as some people feel they are falling over a precipice, so I felt about the dream. It was that which nearly killed me—being haunted by it, as if it were sent as a punishment for—guilt. It wasn't being in prison. I could have borne the hardships and the shame, if I'd known for certain the gray dream wasn't true!"

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CHAPTER XIV

THEN Hugh, instead of putting me away when at last he had heard the worst of all, gathered me more closely in his arms, and I was so tired, so broken, in the telling of the story, that I had no strength to try to send him from me, as I had half promised Lady Mendel. To rest for a few minutes on his heart was the one taste of heaven I could know.

"It wasn't true, darling, it wasn't true," he murmured, as if I were a child to be comforted after some great terror. "You couldn't have done it. Not that there would have been anything to repent if you had—in your sleep. But you didn't."

"Sarah always said that," I sighed wearily. "I couldn't bear the terror of the secret all alone. I had to tell her. I used to tell her everything. She was the only friend I ever had."

"Now you have me, for ever and ever."

"I love you too much to keep you, Hugh."

"Too much to keep me? Why, to let you go would be the end of me. I love you so, that if you went out of my life now, heart and soul I should be like a stopped watch, run down at our last moment together."

I clung to him, and he held me as if he would never let me go. But I knew that I should make him let me go by and bye. I knew how I should have to do it.

"Now you can see what Sarah is to me," I said. "The circumstantial evidence was tremendous. You would hardly believe the way it piled up and up. There I had been, alone with the sick man for six hours of the night, and when they found out what had happened, he'd been dead only three hours. And there was a solution of morphia in a medicine cupboard on his wall—the place where I saw myself standing when the dream began. The bottle had been there a long time. I knew about it only because I heard Doctor Severn ask Mr. Durrand once, in a sharp way, if he'd kept his promise about giving up his doses of morphia. He answered that he had—that the doctor had frightened him so about the stuff, he'd not dared to touch it since. Then Doctor Severn turned to me, explaining that Mr. Durrand had once been prescribed very small doses of morphia for severe pain which prevented him from sleeping, but that the tiniest dose would be dangerous in his present condition. He advised me to remember this, in case Mr. Durrand ever asked me for the medicine. If he did, I was to refuse. He inquired, too, what had become of the old bottle, and Mr. Durrand said it was in the medicine cupboard still, behind all the other bottles, but the doctor needn't fear that after such a warning he would be tempted, because he didn't want to die."

"All the same, probably he broke his word, and did get up and take some, while you were asleep," said Hugh.

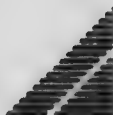
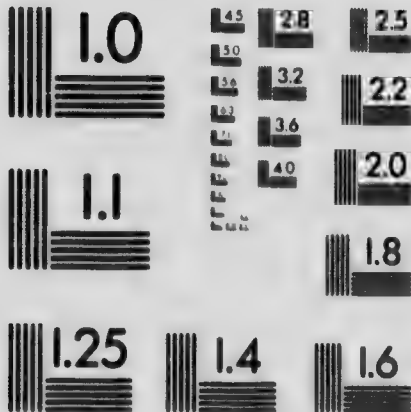
"He couldn't. He was too weak to move without help. And, besides, the tumbler by his bedside was evidently washed after the morphia—or else it was given him in another glass, which was never found. So far as came out in the trial, nobody but myself and

the doctor and Mr. Durrand knew about the bottle being in the medicine cupboard—not even Burton, who was forbidden to touch anything there—hair-dyes and things Mr. Durrand used. And they knew it was *that* bottle, for after the post-mortem, when the doctor told at the inquest about the solution of morphia and our conversation, they found that some of the stuff had quite lately been poured out. Everything was against me. I saw it as the days of the trial went on. I felt that people thought me a monster—so young, yet so cruel and evil: marrying an old man for his money, and nearly killing him by throwing a wine-glass at his head on the wedding-day: having a man come to see me, against my husband's will, when I thought he was absent—poor, girlish Willy Mackinnon! That part made the jury hate me. It was an awful picture the prosecuting attorney conjured up in his speech: Mr. Durrand coming home to find a man he'd forbidden his wife to have in the house—and falling in one of the fits caused by her violence, yet loving her enough, in spite of all, to want her near his bedside. It was said afterwards that the jury were not unfavourable really, but the judge summed up against me, so they were almost obliged to find me guilty. But it seemed, when I listened to the awful speech of the prosecuting attorney, that my death was already decided. I wasn't surprised at all when I heard the verdict—or the sentence. I only wished I might somehow die before it was carried out—for my mother's sake. I knew what the disgrace and horror would mean to her, though she didn't care for me—perhaps she didn't even believe in me. All her friends were cold to her because she'd become notorious—the mother of——”



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"Don't! I won't hear the word!" Hugh cut me short.

"I'll not speak it, dear. But they would have hanged me, I'm sure, if Sarah hadn't been so wonderful. She moved heaven and earth to get me reprieved. She let herself be interviewed in the papers, timid and retiring as she is, and by the things she said, started a revulsion of feeling in my favour. She worked night and day, and got a petition signed by a huge number of people, thousands of important names, all over the country—and there was another petition started in America too. Perhaps my being very young helped a little—I was only nineteen; but it was mostly through Sarah, I know, that my life was saved. Do you wonder I'm grateful? Not that I wanted to *live* for living's sake. But to die like that—it would have been too horrible! Sarah was always sure from the first that I would be saved. She said, 'I promise you,' as if her love made her certain of performing a miracle. And afterwards, when the sentence of death had been changed to imprisonment for life, she gave up her whole time and spent most of a legacy from a relative, working to get me out of prison. There was no other money but hers, for a long time, for my mother was alive till three years ago, and needed all she had for herself. Mr. Durrand hadn't altered his will, but as I was suspected of taking his life it was null, and the money went to his daughter. Even if that had been different I wouldn't have touched a penny of it. I heard Mrs. Frenshaw was sorry I wasn't hanged, for she really believed I did kill her father; and I suppose she was disgusted when the new Home Secretary decided to let me out, as a dying woman, at the end of ten years."

"Oh, Nita, if you had died—and I'd never seen you!" Hugh whispered, as he kissed my hair.

"For you, it would have been better," I said. "But for me—I shall be able to bear the rest of my life, whatever it may be in future, because of this precious memory. And do you know, since the first day I saw you—that day when you were the 'man in the mirror'—I've never once dreamed the gray dream all the way through to the end? So you see, besides teaching me what love is like, you have broken the curse which made my life a constant terror."

"Thank you for telling me that," he said. "Nita, you must marry me as soon as it can be done, because I can't leave you alone after this. I want to be with you night and day, always, close to you—and make you forget."

"You want to be with me—in spite of the dream—which may be true? That seems to me wonderful!"

"It isn't true. And if it were, I should want you just the same. Or if you'd been awake and—yes, I'd want you even then. Wouldn't you me, if it were the other way round?"

"Yes," I said; "but that's different."

"I told you before, that nothing you could have done, or could do, would change my love, except to make it stronger. You believe me now?"

"Yes, I believe you now," I echoed. "You've proved it as I should think no man ever proved his love for a woman."

"Lots have—though not to such a woman. Nita, when will you marry me?"

My lips opened for the word "Never!" but I closed them again. There was no change in my decision. His loving me so wonderfully through all

was not a reason why I should love him little enough to spoil his career. He believed in me, but others would not. I was not even sure whether I believed in myself. The woman he married must be one he could be proud of, his love for her a pedestal, and not a screen. But I knew that holding me in his arms he would not let me go, and that all my arguments he would beat down. I was too weary to fight. All I could do was to play the coward with him as a reward for his courage: to temporise, to persuade him to leave me, and then to send a letter of good-bye. It was turning out differently from what Lady Mendel had planned. It was not going to be easy to make Hugh leave Granada, even when the gate of the garden was shut; but I thought I had found the way: a hard and dreary way, yet I would take it. And some day if he ever saw clearly enough to understand and forgive, he might thank me.

"Why don't you answer?" he asked.

"I can't answer to-night," I said. "I'm broken, Hugh—in spite of your goodness. I'm broken to pieces. I must rest. Will you go, dearest, now that I've done what I had to do, and told you the story? Will you go, and let me sleep?"

He rose from his knees to his feet with one swift movement, carrying me with him, so that we stood together, I still in his arms. It made me feel how strong he was, how capable of taking care of me—and how masterful he would be if I were his. I was glad I should have this feeling to remember among other sweet things. All things associated with him were sweet, though by and by they would be bitter sweet.

"Yes, I'll take you to the house," he said. "I can't let you talk on, when you were so

tired—after all I've made you go through to-day. But I thought it would be best not to stop you—best to get it over and done with, for ever. Now I'm going to carry you. No use resisting."

He picked me up as if I were a baby, with an arm round my waist and the other slipped under my knees. He put his face down against mine, and kept it so, as he walked slowly along the path to the house.

"I shall carry you like this on our wedding-night," he said.

Then he kissed me, and set me down on my feet before the open front door.

"Shall you sleep?" he asked.

"I don't know. Shall you?"

"No, I shan't try. I want to lie awake thinking of you. Tell me one thing before I leave you to rest. Had my sister anything to do with this?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, startled, hardly knowing what to answer.

"Was she fooling me when she pretended to sympathise—and wanted to meet you—and all that? Did she know somehow who you were? Don't try to spare her to me. I'll have it out of her to-night anyhow, if you won't tell me now."

"If I must—yes. She recognised me from photographs that were in the papers last December—when I was let out of prison. The old interest was revived a little, I suppose. Everyone thought I was dying. So did I. The photographs were the ones taken ten years ago, but Lady Mendel knew me from them."

"Oh, so that was it! I might have guessed it was a pretence. Did she make you promise to tell me all this—that you have told?"

"Not exactly that. She made me see it was best. I didn't see at first, or I would have told you before.

But she was right. You mustn't blame her, Hugh. It was for your sake."

"I suppose she threatened to tell me, if you didn't?"

"It wasn't a threat. She didn't frighten me into this, Hugh. I made up my mind that I'd rather speak than let her do it, because without being too kind to myself I might show you the best as well as the worst. And, besides, there was the dream. I had to tell you about that. Don't be angry with Lady Mendel. Don't reproach her."

"You needn't worry about us, darling. It will be all right. Sleep if you can—and dream only good dreams. Dream that we're happy."

"But—they say dreams go by contraries!"

"This won't. It can't. When will you let me come back? You mustn't keep me waiting too many hours, or ' shall be gray-haired—because the hours will seem years."

"And to me, dearest. I'll—I'll write a note—and let you know—how I feel—and everything. Sarah will take it."

"Early to-morrow morning—as soon as you wake up?"

"Yes. Early to-morrow morning. As soon as I wake up."

CHAPTER XV

SARAH had left a lamp for me in the drawing-room, turned low, but many white moths and gauze-winged night insects had flown through the open window to beat themselves against the luminous porcelain shade, and fall, spinning madly in a death dance on the table. Mechanically I glanced at a little travelling clock among the flowers on the mantelpiece. It said only ten minutes past midnight. I had lived through all those years in three hours!

I hoped that Sarah had gone to bed and dropped asleep by this time, because though I meant to tell her that Hugh knew my tragedy, I wanted to write my letter to him without being disturbed. I was deeply tired, so tired that I could not yet feel the full anguish of loss; and I realised that it would be easier to write the kind of letter I must write, before my second calvary began. I thought that I could write almost calmly now, without letting my longing for him show between the lines. And that would be better for him as well as for me, because if he understood all it cost me to send him out of my life he would not go. He would wait, believing that the gate might open.

I carried the lamp to the queer, old-fashioned Spanish writing table in a corner of the room, and the moths that were left alive blundered after me.

When I had turned up the wick, they began dashing their thick bodies on the shade again, until I felt that each blunt, horned head struck against a nerve. My thoughts, wandering and distracted, though I had hoped at first to concentrate them quickly, were to me like these wretched insects of the night, wounding themselves to death for no purpose, dying because of the light by which they might have lived; or, rather, the fluttering creatures seemed like my thoughts, dreadfully "come alive," to show me how futile they were.

I began letter after letter. Knowing exactly what I wanted to say, it was extraordinary how impossible it was to make it take the right form on paper.

"I wonder if God ever finds it hard to choose the right body for a soul He has made," I caught myself vaguely thinking.

The letter I headed "Darling Hugh" turned into a cry of love. That was the last thing I must send him! Another was as laconic as if written at a stranger's dictation. A third was so rambling and stupid that he would not know what I meant to do or wished him to do. A hundred little hammers were knocking in my brain when I had torn up six sheets of paper, and was beginning again for the seventh time.

"Seventh, successful," I repeated dully to myself, in a silly, childish way.

"This is good-bye, dear Love," I wrote, "and because you love me I ask you to take me at my word. You see, it's for my own sake as well as yours that I ask it. The more I love you the more miserable I should be if I were wicked and mad enough to marry you. It was only because I was quite, quite mad to-day in the Generalife gardens that I offered to go away

with you. I'm not ashamed of that *conventionally*, but I am ashamed that it entered my mind as a possible solution. Now that I have made myself sane again by telling you my story, I see it would never have done—not because it wouldn't have been fair to me, as you thought, but because it would have been almost as bad for you as my being your wife. I couldn't have been hidden. I should have been a plague spot. 'That horrible woman—that murderess, who ought to have been hanged—who was smuggled out of prison by a trick, pretending she was at death's door—a hypocrite to the last! And now she's got her claws on that splendid young fellow who might have reached any height.' I can hear the words your friends—your truest friends—would say. And if you dream I could be happy with you, it's because you don't know women. Our life together would be a living death for me. I couldn't stand it long. I should kill myself to escape, and to save you from repenting your sacrifice. Even if you didn't feel that, I should believe you did, and so it would be the same thing for me. And I should

so that sooner or later, your love would be drowned in regret for what you had given up—all a brave man's highest ambitions. I shouldn't love and respect you as I do, if the best woman in the world could make up to you for such a loss; and I am, oh, so dreadfully far from being the best woman in the world!

"I was at peace before you came, in my garden. Go, beloved, *for my sake*, and let me try to find peace again. Some day you will be glad, my soldier, that I ordered you to take up your sword which you would have had to lay down for me—so unworthy. And I shall be glad in thinking of you, in reading of noble things you have done for your country. I shall feel

I sent you to do them, as my knight; and so you will still be mine, in the best way—our only way.

"Perhaps, when you have read so far, you may still be saying to yourself that you will stay. But if you do stay, I tell you that you will be signing my death warrant. I will not live to hamper your life and to suffer remorse. *I will end everything.* You can keep me from doing this only by leaving Granada at once without trying to see me again, or to write asking me to change my mind. This is what I meant when I said good-bye to you a little while ago. It is not a new decision, since you left me alone. If you go we shall both find peace, I in my garden, you wherever your soldier's life may take you.

"In certain convents there is always a light on the altar and a nun praying. My heart will be such a convent, with the light of love unquenchable, and a never-ending prayer for your happiness. Good-bye, with all the word means of blessing. NITA."

I addressed the envelope, and folded the letter quickly, feeling that it was safer not to read it through. But as I was ready to seal it up, an irresistible longing came over me to see again the words which Hugh's eyes would see to-morrow. It must be some such longing as a lover has to look just once more on the body of his dead love, before the coffin lid is screwed down. But I should have been wise if I had obeyed my instinct. Reading the letter I had written brought suddenly and terribly home to me the future I decreed for myself.

Hugh gone—Hugh forgetting me—Hugh marrying and being happy! The best in me wanted all this to happen; but the other me I had never been able to get away from, was near and close, the better part remote and coldly white as the praying nun in

the convent I pictured for Hugh. "Tear up the letter! Let him stay—just for a little while longer, to be your friend as he has been these eight days," the human love I had condemned cried out to me on its knees. "He wou'd rather have that than nothing. Just a little while, till you both get used to the thought of parting. Think what your garden will be without him!"

What platitudes I had been writing about peace coming back to me in the garden! It would be no longer a garden, but a burnt-up wilderness, where the flowers were little charred corpses. Hugh had come and brought love instead of peace, and I would not have that pale ghost again at the cost of not knowing that for which a woman is made. But there would be no peace for me any more.

I sealed the letter, weeping, but I let no tears fall on it or on the envelope. Then, when it was ready, and there was no more to do, my soul sickened and my heart turned to water. I had no strength left, nor courage, nor wish to go upstairs and try to rest. Crying and whimpering desolately, like a lost child, I let myself fall on a poor imitation Moorish divan near the desk where I had written the letter. For a time I lay there; then I slid off from the low bank of cushions which smothered me in the hot stillness of the night, and lay along the floor, on the cool tiles. I cried softly, with some vague wish, instinctive rather than active, not to wake Sarah. I wished that I might die without the sin and weakness of taking my own life, or else that years might pass on like this, in a dim dream of falling tears and a cool, hard resting-place where all was very quiet.

I thought that I wished to be alone; but when, after what might have been a very long time or a

very short time, I heard Sarah's footsteps coming downstairs, I was suddenly glad in a strange, child-like way. Nothing she could say would comfort me, but it would be a comfort to feel her love, and I had felt it in prison on the days when her visits were allowed. It seemed selfish to let her find me lying on the floor, abandoned to misery, but when I heard her, there was not time to scramble up and make a pretence to save her feelings. At the door she saw me, and ran across the room like a young woman.

"My lamb!" she crooned, and folding herself down beside me, gathered me into her arms. "Tell me, Sarah, what's the matter!"

I nestled my face against her thin breast, in spite of the old-fashioned corsets, for she was not even undressed.

"I hoped you were asleep," I sighed, as she smoothed my hair with a trembling hand.

"No, indeed; I was just waitin' up there," she said. "But it's 'most three o'clock. I left you alone yourself after I heard you come in as long as I could, till I got scared. Oh, I hope you don't mind your Sarah knowin' you're in trouble? Maybe she can help a little?"

"Nobody can help, dear," I answered, "but don't mind your knowing. I was going to tell you to-morrow. I thought I'd let you sleep to-night."

"Did you truly think I could sleep when my one was breakin' her heart? I've just bin on pins and needles every livin' minute since that woman came to call!"

"Did you hear our talk?" I asked. We started as we were, on the floor. We had no thought of moving.

"Only a few words at first, but I didn't try to listen, honest and true. I was sittin' by the window because it was cool; an' afterward you both talked too low for me to hear. It was the tones of the voices told me things were goin' wrong. I seemed just to *know* in my bones what 'was."

"Well, you were right," I said. "Sarah, I've told Hugh—the whole story—the dream and everything."

"Lord o' mercy, Miss Nita, have you done that?" she gasped. "He—the Captin—what did he say? He didn't—*fail* you?"

"No, Sarah," I answered, with a thrill of joy and pride in my lover; "he didn't fail me. He was a saint—an angel—no, better still, a *man*."

"Heaven be praised, my lamb! Then why—why are you cryin', just when God's goin' to let you be happy?"

"I'm crying because I'm a coward," I said, "and because I hate giving him up. But I shall give him up, of course. I'd be a wretch—a devil to take advantage of his love. I couldn't argue it all out with him to-night. I was too tired. For I've written a letter, to tell him he must go away at once—that I'll not see him again."

"I'm plumb sure he won't go," said Sarah. "He ain't that kind of a man."

"I've told him in the letter that unless he gives me up and leaves Granada, I'll end everything."

"Oh, my precious, not—not *kill* yourself?"

"I'd have to do it if he stayed, rather than his whole future should be wasted and ruined," I explained to her. "But by saying that, I've made it impossible for him to stay. It was the one way I could think of, for he'd know that I would keep my word if he drove me to it."

I felt Sarah's bosom rise convulsively under my head, as she held me clasped.

"I thought we'd suffered all we had to suffer," she said in a piteous, breaking voice, "but now to have *this* come! It seems 'most worse than what went before. It don't seem *right*. You'll be breakin' *his* heart as much as your own. Don't make up your mind so quick on the spur o' the minute like this. 'Most always, second thoughts are best. If he wants you as bad as he thinks he does, won't you be makin' a big mistake sendin' him out into the world alone? Give him the chance to sacrifice something for you. He asks nothin' better. He's a real man. Why not marry him an' go 'way off somewheres, you an' he together—not even me, 'cause he don't like me, an' it wouldn't be fair—somewheres nobody'd know who you'd bin. Then it couldn't do the Captin any harm."

"There's no such 'somewhere,'" I said. "Even if there were, at the other end of all things, it would be no place for him to waste his life. We came here to Granada, and shut ourselves up in a walled garden, to escape eyes. And I just missed meeting the Moffats, whom I used to know. Then comes Lady Mendel, who recognises me from the old photographs in the newspapers. And even Lady Kathleen Arnott thought when she saw me at the Generalife, my 'face looked familiar.' No, there's no escape for a woman like me."

"Don't say that as if you was a bad woman!" Sarah cried. "You're just like a white fawn with an arrow shot into its side by a wicked hunter."

"The world—*his* world, thinks I'm a bad woman," I reminded her. "There's no getting away from that. If they could say no more than 'Hugh Shannon has

married a woman who was tried for murder, but proved innocent and acquitted,' it would be a different thing—oh, my God, *what* a different thing!"

"Then you'd marry him?" Sarah murmured.

"I'd marry him to-morrow. There'd be no reason why not, since only suffering and not crime—or supposed crime—would have made me notorious. But what's the good of talking like this? 'Might have beens' only make me more sad in thinking of them. Don't let's talk any more, dear. Will you go to the hotel with the letter early to-morrow morning? I won't trust Pepé or Marta."

"Deed, yes, honey, I'll go to the hotel," she agreed. "I reckon you're right about the talk. You're fagged out. Will you let me help you upstairs to bed?"

"I don't need any help," I said. "I'm all right now—only so tired. It's made me better, telling you. But we've had enough, haven't we?"

"Yes, we've had enough," she repeated.

Slowly I dragged myself upstairs, and Sarah followed, having closed the drawing-room windows and locked the front door, which I had forgotten to fasten. In thinking of this, I remembered suddenly that Hugh still had the key to the gate. I mentioned it to Sarah as she helped me to undress.

"Ask him for it if you can see him at his hotel in the morning," I began, then changed my mind as I spoke. "No, better not see him. I'd rather you wouldn't. You might break down. It would be too dreadful to have a scene at the hotel! Besides, he would ask you questions about me. It would be harrowing for him too. I won't open my letter again. But leave a line at the hotel, and say you'll

send Pepé for the key—Hugh needn't write. I don't want him to write to either of us."

"I'll do everything for the best, as well as I can," Sarah soothed me. "Now let me put you to bed, and you try to sleep. Maybe you can, you're so tired out. And don't feel you must wake up in the morning to remind me of what you want me to do. I shan't forget one single thing. There won't be any scene at the hotel, no fear. I'll write the line, just as you say, and get the key back. 'Twould do you more good than anything in the world—except the one thing you won't take—to sleep right plumb through to-morrow, till evening. Suppose I tell Marta and Pepé they can have a holiday, so as there won't be any noise about the house or in the garden? Those two folks won't keep quiet."

"But what about the key of the gate, if Pepé goes off for the day?" I asked.

"That'll be all right. I'll think of a way to fix everything. Just you trust me, and put it out of your mind, will you, lovey?"

"Yes. I always do trust you, Sarah," I said. "Nobody ever deserved it more."

"I ain't talkin' about what I deserve," she protested, in the quick, anxious way she had of hiding from any praise. "Would you like to take a few grains of veronal in a little milk, dearie?"

"We haven't any veronal, have we?"

"There's a few tabloids left they gave me when you came out of the nursing home, along with a lot of other things you hadn't finished up."

"Oh, I'm glad," I exclaimed. "I didn't think it would be possible to sleep, but with veronal I might. Do give me ten grains."

"No, five's enough," she said, decisively. "That's the dose the nurses used to give, I know."

When she had put me into bed, between cool sheets, she flitted away, and soon came back with the tabloid of veronal and a glass of milk.

I did not expect the drug to take effect for half an hour at least, but almost at once I felt myself slipping away into darkness and peace. I knew even then that peace would not last, but my tired brain grasped it with thankfulness, even for a little while.

CHAPTER XVI

WHEN I waked up with a start, sunlight was streaming on to my face.

For a minute I felt only a vague, dull ache of physical wretchedness. Needles of pain threaded through my temples, and I had a sensation that my eyes had grown very old. Then, like a weight of lead dropping from the ceiling on to my breast, came the consciousness of what had happened. A door seemed to open in front of me, showing the future like a long, dusty road.

Hardly knowing why, I sprang out of bed, as if to escape from under the weight. I felt that I must do something—anything—to get away from myself. I wavered a little, and caught the back of a chair. The veronal was still in my brain. In a moment, however, the swimming in my head passed, and sliding my feet into the soft heelless slippers Sarah had made, I walked to the window. The air revived me. I wished that I were dressed, so that I might walk in the garden, among the dewy flowers. I could see a diamond glitter still on the great hydrangeas, in pots on a shadowed part at the west end of the terrace, so I knew it must be early. My bracelet watch was on the dressing-table, and I was sorry I had forgotten to wind it up last night. I supposed it would be run down; but no, it must

have been wound by thoughtful Sarah. A quarter to eight! I wondered if she had gone to bed and had slept; but I thought it more like her to have spent hours on her knees, crying and praying for me. It would not be the first time she had passed a night so.

All wish to sleep was gone. My brain, though it throbbed, felt terribly alive. I could not go back to bed. I longed for the garden, but dared not go out if Sarah were asleep, for fear of waking her by unlocking the front door whose bolts were stiff.

Her room and mine were next each other, but not communicating. I slipped out into the corridor, and, half in regret, half in relief, saw that her door was open. I peeped through. Her bed had not been lain in, or else she had made it up early in the morning. Going to the head of the stairs I called her.

"Sarah—Sarah!"

There was no answer. The blood rushed to my head, drumming in my ears.

"She has gone out already," I thought, "to take my letter to Hugh. Perhaps by this time he has it. Maybe he's reading it now!"

I felt that I could hardly bear the waiting till Sarah should come. To see her, to hear what had happened at the hotel—though if all had gone according to my hope, nothing would have happened—seemed the one thing I had to live for. After that, darkness.

I went to my room, and bathed in the tub which was always ready overnight. I brushed my hair away from my face with a wet brush, and the short waves fell over my ears and throat with cool touches, like birds' wings. Then I dressed quickly, putting on the tea-gown I had worn to speak with Hugh in the

arbour, and ran down to look for Sarah, though I was sure beforehand that she had not come.

"I'll walk on the terrace till I hear her," I thought.

I was thankful she had given Pepé and Maria a holiday. She must have seen them already, or they would be here by this time. Probably she had waited at the gate to send them home. It would be like her to think of that, when almost anyone else would have forgotten.

The hot sun found me on the terrace, and seemed to press upon my head a tight golden helmet, so I took the path to the fountain arbour. It was silent and almost sad, for the water was not playing. It would not come on until afternoon.

"But even when the fountain speaks again," I thought, "it will never say the same things."

Looking at it with dull eyes, which still felt very old, I heard a sound; and thinking that Sarah must have returned, I stepped outside the arbour on to the path. My lips were open to call her, when a voice spoke. It was Hugh's. I could not hear what he said, but I knew he was in the garden; and I started to run back into the house. Then I stopped abruptly. Walking up from the gate, he would come between me and the villa. I should meet him on the way. Yet I should not be safe in the arbour. If he were looking for me, he would search there, as always.

Fear seized me—fear of him and of myself, and of destiny. Hugh must have read the letter, and have come in spite of it. Then he did not believe I would keep my word! He still hoped to persuade me. It was all to do over again, and I had not strength for the battle. The only way was to carry out my threat now, before he could stop me. I

remembered the mirador close by. There might be just time to get there without being seen. As the thought came into my head, I flew to the place, and up the broken steps at the side of the rickety flower-draped building. To get in, I had to part with both hands the cataract of bougainvillea and ivy and convolvulus that billowed over roof and windows. Trailing branches curtained even the entrance; and the open back of the mirador, facing the garden, was completely screened with a leafy tapestry.

Once inside, I was out of sight even if Hugh came to the arbour, though the path there would lead him directly under the summer-house. All I had to do for the moment was to keep still. Then I must make up my mind what to do next. The front of the mirador, looking down over the old town, was built on the verge of a precipice. I could pass out of Hugh's life—since he refused to let me go an easier way—simply by leaning against the slight bar of crumbling wood which had once guarded the opening.

Sarah had turned giddy the first and only time I brought her into this secret, sad retreat. Her face was drained of blood, and with a little squeal of fear, she had run blindly past me, down the steps; then, ashamed of her panic, she had begged my pardon for going first, making me promise never to sit in the mirador. I was not breaking the letter of that promise now though I broke it in spirit.

"This will kill Sarah when she finds out," I thought. "What a reward for her long years of love!" Yet Hugh was more to me than Sarah—Hugh, whom I had known less than a month.

I hesitated, with lights dancing before my eyes, reddening the sunshine. Then I saw Hugh coming, Sarah with him. I turned away from them, in

blind haste to lean against the broken barrier before my spirit of courage failed. But Sarah spoke, and something in her tone forced me to stop and listen.

"In the arbour, Captin, where you and she used to sit, I can tell it better, for I'll have to sit down. I ain't strong on my feet this morning. And it's the furthest place away from the house, where we can't wait her up. Walk in."

It was odd, perhaps, that sheer curiosity should hold me back from death, but I could not die without knowing what Sarah had to tell Hugh. It seemed like treachery to me that she should have brought him into the garden, after what I had said, but perhaps there was some excuse. I did not want to go out of the world wronging her as well as breaking her heart. Before I died I must know what they were going to say about me, and why Hugh had come in spite of my letter.

They went into the arbour. I could peep through the thick flowery curtain and see them, though they could not see me. Sarah sank, rather than deliberately sat, on the stone seat. Her side face was turned to me, as she looked up to Hugh, who stood near her, close to the fountain. I could see only his back as he stood so, his hands clasped behind him. He seemed immensely tall, towering above the small, seated figure of Sarah, and she very little and shrunken, crouching limply forward. I was afraid that the night's vigil had told sorely upon her, for she sat with her arms stretched out, one on either side holding on tensely by the edge of the seat.

"I am mighty glad I met you, Captin," she said "for I shouldn't have dared wait any longer away from Miss Nita, and I wouldn't have left the letter at the hotel, with you out. When I heard you warn'

in, I made pretty sure you'd be comin' round here early to ask how Miss Nita was, so I hurried along home, and caught you up just in time. This is better than you readin' my letter. And in it I asked you to come and see me, anyhow."

I wondered what she could mean, what she had written to Hugh instead of the request I had told her to make for the key.

"What did you write in your letter?" Hugh seemed to speak out my thought, as if I had communicated it to his mind. "You're frightening me a little, you know. You say there's no bad news, yet there's something you couldn't tell at the gate, to put me out of suspense."

"When a body has to confess, it can't be done in a hurry, Captin. It's a hard thing to do, anyways, I've got to confess to you. I couldn't to Miss Nita, not in words, to her face. 'Twould be the death of me!"

"Something you can tell me, but not her?" Hugh echoed, evidently puzzled, and a little stiff in manner as he was apt to be with Sarah, in spite of his good resolutions.

"Yes, because you don't like me, and she—my precious lamb—loves and trusts me with all her heart. I've bin real glad from the first you didn't like me, sir. It give me a respect for you, your seein' through me. You felt there was somethin' wrong, didn't you?"

"Not wrong exactly. Strange," Hugh answered.

"Ah, you want to be kind an' not hurt me, for her sake! I reckon you're afraid to do an injustice. But you couldn't be unjust to me, Captin. I'm the blackest sinner on this earth. I let Miss Nita suffer all those years, because I was too vile a coward to give

myself up, and be hung. 'Twas for her I did what I did, and I don't repent *that* part so much. I meant to save her from that beast, an' it seemed as if 'twas no worse than to kill a mad dog. But when 'twas found out—that's where I failed! I never calc'lated it would be found out. I thought they'd believe he just died in his sleep; an' so they would a' done, if it hadn't bin for Mis' Frenshaw and that Burton. They were two fiends together, plottin' against my girl."

Hugh's voice cut, sharp and incisive, into the ramblings which held me dazed.

"Do you know what you're saying? Do you mean me to understand that you poisoned Durrand?"

"Yes, sir. I did it. I gave him the morphine. I wanted him to be out of her way, he was so dreadful, an' she was so young an' sweet. At first I hoped he was goin' to drop off of his own accord, for he was mighty sick, but the doctor thought he was gettin' better, so there was no time to wait, and I just did the best I could."

"Good God! And you'd have let them hang her! That's your love!"

"Oh, no, sir, I wouldn't. I do *believe* I'd ha' got the courage to speak if it had come to that. Just wait, sir, till I tell you. I don't mind your bein' hard on me. You can't hate me no worse than I have myself all these years, an' she worshippin' me for a saint. My, how I've lived through it I don't know. But I just *had* to live till I could get her free an' make her well, an' maybe find someone to love her when she hadn't me. Oh, I don't want to get confused. I want to tell you the way it was, so you can know how to do what's best, but your eyes are like swords, sir, they'll not let me think."

"I won't look at you. Go back to the beginning.

I'll try not to interrupt. Tell me what happened that night."

"The night when I——"

"Yes; when you gave Durrand the morphia. Had you been planning it?"

"When the doctor said he'd get well, that's when it came into my head. It made me feel sick, but it seemed as if I must do it, to save her. I thought if he lived, maybe she'd kill herself, she was so desperate with the life he led her. If I could, I'd ha' done it one of the nights when I was sittin' up with him, but before I had the idea, she'd taken on the night work. I tried to coax her to let me go on for every other one, but she wouldn't, an' she was so queer and nervous I was afraid if I said too much she might guess what was in my head. I wasn't sure then whether she knew I'd heard the doctor askin' Mr. Durrand about the morphine, and his sayin' the bottle was in the medicine cupboard. 'Twas only afterward I found out she didn't know I was in the next room when they were talkin' that day. It seemed providential my hearin' it was there, as if the thing was meant to *be*; like with Jael and Sisera. God wanted Jael to kill him, an' her name's gone down in glory for what she did. Only that was different. She didn't let the blame fall on someon. else. But I never dreamed I *was* goin' to do that. I prayed for strength to carry it all out just right; an' the idea come to me, to give Miss Nita some chlorodyne in her coffee. You can buy that at any drug store, you know, sir, and she was always right easy to affect with any sleepin' medicines."

"Then it was you she saw in what she calls the gray dream."

"On my word, I don't know, sir It might ha' bin

all a dream or I might ha' bin mixed up in it, with her half asleep an' half awake. I wasn't in a gray wrapper. I had on a black dress. But I did just those things she dreamed about. I went to the medicine cupboard an' found the queer shaped bottle back o' the other bottles, an' I poured out the stuff, an' mixed it in a tumbler with his heart-medicine. But not the tumbler on his table. I brought one with me, an' washed it out afterwards. Then I put back the bottle where I'd got it. The next thing I went over an' touched Mr. Durrand on the shoulder. Before he was quite waked up, I had the stuff down his throat, and a drink of water after so it wouldn't leave a smell; an' I praised the Lord, sendin' up a prayer there an' then, that the thing was over an' Miss Nita free. If I'd a dreamed they'd think anything was wrong, I'd not have dared, for her sake, especially with her sittin' there in the room alone with him. But the talk always was that he might die of his heart just stoppin' short. Everything seemed goin' on all right. It never entered the doctor's mind 'twasn't a natural death, till the valet and Mis' Frenshaw put their heads together. Even then, he thought 'twas a foolish thing to have the post mortem. That man Burton and Mr. Durrand's daughter were our bad geniuses. If it hadn't bin for them, Miss Nita would ha' lived a happy life from that day to this, an' had cause to bless me. When they arrested her, I wanted to say 'twas me they must take to prison, but I just couldn't open my lips. 'Twas like as if I had lockjaw an' palsy both together whenever I tried. An' I says to myself I might wait and see first what the verdict was; then, if 'twas against her, I'd *have* to tell, rather than harm should come to Miss Nita. But what I hoped, even when things looked blackest, was that the jury'd neve: find

a beautiful young girl like her guilty, nor the judge sentence her to die."

"But when she was sentenced?"

"Oh, sir, you're so brave, you don't know what it is to be a coward. It's 'most like a disease. I reckon it's worse than drink with a drunkard. I put off, even then. Not that I minded the thought of dyin' or goin' before my God. 'Twas the thought of me, a woman o' my age, who'd bin respectable an' church-goin' all her life, bein' trussed up an' blindfolded an' hung with a rope around my neck. A long time ago when I wasn't much more'n a child, I seen a picture in a paper of some woman that was hung, in the time of the War between the North and South. Her name was Mrs. Surratt, an' she was a respectable woman, too. There she was in her dress, like she wore for every day, with her limbs all twined up in rope, so she couldn't struggle, an' her dress tied down an' her poor feet danglin' like a rag doll's. It made me right down sick, that picture, an' I couldn't never forget it. Since that day I couldn't read a word about an execution or any kind of killin', without feelin' as if I should faint away. I could just see the photograph of that woman before my eyes, while I was wrestlin' with my soul to speak out an' tell I done it, as if it might ha' bin me I saw. It wasn't *decent* to have to end like that. I went to work to save Miss Nita some other way, and there was petitions signed, and all the newspapers in our favour. I reckon a day didn't pass but I talked with some reporter, an' told our story, how young an' good Miss Nita was; an' how impossible she should poison her husband, though he was no better than a beast. A gentleman who owned several papers, an' who was always takin' up the cause of those who were weak or injured, had long articles in his newspapers,

about how easy 'twould ha' been for Mr. Durrand to get up an' take the morphine in spite of what the doctors said; an' other doctors wrote letters to the newspapers in our favour. At first opinion seemed against Miss Nita, but when she was sentenced it all turned the other way, an' everybody said what a wicked shame to hang a young girl like that on circumstantial evidence. It wasn't long before the sentence was changed to imprisonment, an' though it was for life, I *knew* I'd save her somehow. Even then I wanted to tell the truth, but she was out o' danger of death, an' they'd ha' hung me without any manner o' doubt if I confessed. I thought to myself, she's better off in *prison* than she would be if he'd lived; I was sure if she could choose she'd rather stay there a few years than have her old Sarah killed such a way as that."

"You might at least have let her choose, instead of leaving her to be cursed by that awful dream repeating itself, and making her believe she was guilty. It's a wonder fear didn't drive her mad!"

"Oh, I know, sir, I know! But there was my cowardice again. I loved her so, an' she loved me an' called me her good angel. How could I tell her what would lose me her love in a minute? Not so much about the poison, for that was for her sake, an' I was never ashamed of it, in itself, if you can understand. But to have her know that while she was believin' in me, I'd sent her to prison—an' let her risk worse! No, I couldn't. But I've been punished for my sin as I wouldn't punish my worst enemy. While she was in prison, I died a new kind o' death each day an' night that passed over my head, thinkin' of her *there*—she who loved out of doors an' flowers—an' me free to go an' come. I reckon 'twould ha'

bin a heap less sufferin' to give myself up to be tried an' hung, than live as I did for ten years. They made a wreck o' my health, such as I had, an' I'm *glad*. I never eat a decent meal or took a walk in the fresh air for exercise, because she couldn't. I didn't want to have luxuries she hadn't got. Maybe when I die, I shall have to burn with the goats in hell, but I don't believe it can be so much worse than what I've gone through already from bein' a coward."

"But why, if you held back all those years when she was suffering tortures of mind and privations and shame in prison, do you come forward and confess now, you strange woman!"

"Just because, sir, I see it would be worse for Miss Nita than anything that's come yet, to lose you. She won't have you—nothin' on earth can make her change her mind—as long as she thinks perhaps she killed her husband, who never *was* her husband. I can't tell her myself, but you can; an' you must just help me to get away somehow before you do tell, so I won't have to meet her eyes again afterwards. Will you do that, Captin?"

"Wait a minute. Let me think. You want to go away—to disappear?"

"It's the only thing. I couldn't stand havin' her hate me, after all these blessed years of love."

"Blessed years!"

"I wasn't thinkin' what I said, sir; though in some ways they *was* blessed for me in spite of all. I'll go before to-morrow mornin', sir, but I'd like you to grant me till then. You wouldn't grudge my seein' her once more? Besides, she ain't well. She ain't fit to be left. I know just how to comfort her an' nurse her up, an' make the food that she can eat. If

I walk right out of the house now, before she's better, it will give her a shock."

"I can't bear to think of your being near her!" Hugh said, as he had said once before. "But—I don't know what's best for Nita. There's one thing, though. You will have to write out this confession just as you have told it to me, and sign it, or it won't be of any use. It would probably be thought we'd coerced you—and that may be what they'll think anyhow——"

"But I have written it, sir. Did I forget to mention that? I meant to tell you, when I'd come to where I was tryin' to get her reprieved. That's the time I wrote it, because I was determined, if I failed, I'd just take some of the same stuff I give *him*, so as to escape the worst, an' leave the true story to save her life. I give the sealed envelope to the manager of the bank where I put my legacy: a very kind gentleman who took a great interest in Miss Nita and me, though he never saw her that I know of. I just said I wasn't strong, an' as I might die sudden somehow, I wanted him to see that certain instructions were carried out if I went. He promised that the minute news came of my death, he'd break the seal and read the letter, but meanwhile it should stay in the safe till it was wanted, an' he hoped it would be years. There it is now, in his keepin', Captin, with a lot more details than I've give to you. But—but you don't mean you want me to let him *use* it, do you—without my bein' dead?"

"I want you to telegraph—no, I suppose he wouldn't act on that—I want you to write a letter telling the bank manager to open the envelope at once!"

"Oh, Captin, but it will all come out, and they can

arrest me! I'd be hung even now! Do give me time to hide myself somewhere. I'll write *you* a letter to send. I'll do it now when I go in, before Miss Nita wakes up. She's pretty sure to sleep a good while yet. Won't that suit you?" she pleaded, hands pressed to thin breast, hunted eyes looking up.

"What about *her*—Nita? You say she won't have anything to do with me—that she's made up her mind. Then she's suffering—because she loves me. You haven't given me her letter, but——"

"No, because I knew what she said in it. She c'dn't want you to come here again, an' I *had* to have you come. That's why I hurried to find you, so she would be asleep. But I'll tell you what I'll do, Captin: I'll say I've seen you, an' you've got a plan by which you're 'most sure you can prove her innocence, a plan she'd never guess. An' all you ask is for her to wait just one day, till to-morrow morning, before she decides to give you up. She *will* wait. I know I can make her wait!"

"I can't give you as long. I don't trust you enough."

"I don't blame you, sir! How long will you give me, then?"

He thought for an instant.

"Till two o'clock this afternoon. She'll wake before that. You must persuade her to see me when she does. When I come you can give me the letter for your bank manager. Then you must go away, while I am with her, telling what you've told me. Meanwhile I'll arrange where it's best for you to go first. After that it will be wiser, when the thing comes out, that we shouldn't know what's become of you. I'll find a place and look up trains; and I'll give you plenty of money."

"I don't want that, sir, thank you. I've always kept a good sum by me in case of some sudden need like this. I've got six hundred dollars of my own in the house. That's enough to last me a year. I've lived on less."

"And afterwards?"

"Oh, I reckon a year'll about see me through to the end o' my tether. I'm mighty near wore out, thank God. But you'll give me a little grace before you send the letter to London, won't you, sir?"

"That's for Nita to decide."

"Yes, sir, I reckon you're right. That ought to be for her to decide."

"I'll have to see that she doesn't put it off too long. Is it understood, at two o'clock you'll send her here to me, and be ready to go?"

"I'll be—ready, for sure!"

"I wonder if I can trust you?"

"Oh, do, sir! You won't be sorry."

"I'll run the risk—unless something new turns up. I have the key of the garden, and I'll keep it. If you don't persuade Nita to see me, I'll come anyhow. Where's her letter? I want it."

"Captin, I never took it to the hotel. I only took a letter from me. I didn't want you to have hers, ever. An' I can't get it without wakin' her, for I slipped it under her door on purpose. I reckon she wouldn't find it even if she woke up, because it went under the rug that lies inside the door. But it would rouse her, sure, for me to fetch it; an' she needs her rest."

"You've got the cunning of madness about you!"

"It's more the cunning of love, sir, maybe. For I do love Miss Nita better'n my soul, though you mayn't believe it. Would you—would you please

just go now, sir?—for if I'm to write that letter I must be by myself, an' try to get back a little strength an' wit before I can begin. An' there's a good deal to do before I—before I——"

"Yes, I'll go now," said Hugh, as promptly as he had said the same words to me last night. "I'll come back at two o'clock and open the gate; and I shall look for Miss Nita here!"

His head down, hardly glancing at Sarah, he walked out of the summer-house, but before he had taken many steps she ran after him, calling. He stopped and turned, only a yard or two past the mirador.

"You'll break it gently to her, won't you, Captin?" Sarah asked, in a quavering voice. "You'll begin somehow, so as to work up to what's comin', not to shock her too much?"

"You can trust me to be gentle," Hugh said, and walked on as if anxious to get away.

But Sarah followed, and caught up with him, panting. I heard her say:

"It ain't for myself; it's for *her*. You see, I've bin with her since she was a baby, and ——"

The rest was lost. With short steps she hurried on beside him. I was sure she would not leave him till they reached the gate.

CHAPTER XVII

SARAH'S first rambling words gave their secret to me even before Hugh seized it. The shock of their true meaning was a lightning stroke. It was as if I had been half electrocuted, and then allowed to live. My mind received impressions, but could make no use of them. Sarah's weak voice droning on was like a gramophone. I understood all she said, but something kept it from seeming important. I listened as if to a character in some scene at a theatre, in which I was interested only because it was well acted. I felt that it was realistic, that the two persons who were acting would do as they did now, if it were life and not the stage. I did not hate Sarah in the least, nor even love her less, nor feel any horror of her because she had killed someone, nor did I rejoice because the gray dream of myself doing the thing was not true. Everything was to me as it had always been, and this scene that was going on in the harbour had nothing at all to do with my past or future.

This was the state of my mind until Hugh asked for my letter, and Sarah told him that she had not taken it to the hotel, but had slipped it under my door. Then, suddenly, the whole thing became real and intimate. I was indignant with her for not taking the letter that I had written as if with my heart's blood. An instant after, something seemed to laugh bitterly

and horribly in my brain. It said, "You are angry with her for hiding the letter. What about the rest? What about her letting you spend the best years of your youth in prison while she pretended to move heaven and earth to save you?"

I looked down through the flowery curtain of the mirador on to her meek gray head, and loathed it. "Hypocrite! Wretch!" were the words that burned in my mind. It disgusted me to think how I had worshipped her, how I had kissed her lying lips, her hands of a murderess. I thought of the dream and my slavery to it, how she had comforted me stammeringly, saying it was only a dream, she was sure, and not true. How sure she *had* been, and had never told me! I wondered that Hugh could stand there and question and not kill her.

Then it leaped into my comprehension that the horror of my own guilt was over. I had not got up in my sleep and gone to the medicine cupboard and poured out the poison. Sarah had done it; Sarah had done it all. She had let me suffer, but I was free at last! There was no stain on my soul. For a moment I forgot my hatred of Sarah. I was wildly happy. "Free—free!" I said in my thoughts, and clasped my hands in thanksgiving, as I never had when I came out of prison; for then I was still in bondage to the dream.

"I must tell Sarah," I found myself thinking, with my old habit of going to her with everything; but the dreadful laugh came in my brain again, and I remembered that I had lost Sarah. There was not and never had been such a saintly, splendid Sarah as I had loved. She was not gone, for she had never existed. The little crumpled old woman down there in the arbour was a cruel, treacherous, whining thing

to turn away from with detestation. I felt alone in a world empty of my Sarah's kind presence, and almost I would have crept back under the shadow of the old fear, if I could have found my beloved nurse and friend waiting there for me with arms open.

I still hated Sarah while she promised to persuade me into seeing Hugh, and agreed to leave me for ever. When she ran after him I did not think, with a pang of fear, as I would yesterday, how bad it was for her heart that she should run. I did not care what happened to her, or how much she suffered. I thought only of myself and my ruined youth, and how I was to avoid meeting that woman when she came back from the gate. My reason for hiding in the mirador was entirely forgotten. I did not even remember to be thankful that I had not thrown away my life before knowing Sarah's secret. The wish to die had been swept violently out of my mind. Suddenly, however, it occurred to me that I need not stay in the mirador. I could make a quick dash into the house while Sarah was gone, and lock my door upon her for the first time. For awhile she would believe me to be asleep. After that—but when would I begin to realise that it no longer mattered to me what she thought or felt?

She must have lingered in the garden for some reason, because ten minutes passed after I had darted into the house and fastened my bolt, before I heard the soft patter of feet on tiptoe outside my door. Sarah had come upstairs, and was listening, wondering if I were awake. I lay on the bed, quite still except for the pounding of my heart. If she peeped through the keyhole, she could see nothing but a ray of sunlight from the window, falling perhaps upon the silver toilet things on the dressing-table—silver things she had given me.

It seemed mysterious and horrible to know that she was there, the wicked new Sarah in place of the one who had been so dear, and that I was hiding from her, that I was hoping to avoid speaking to her, or seeing her again ever in this world.

By and by she went away. It was very still in the corridor, with a stillness which was deathly in my ears. Of course, she had not begun yet to think it strange that I had not waked. It was only half-past nine. What was she doing now? Was she getting ready for her long journey? Was she writing the letter she had promised Hugh to write, or was she perhaps putting on paper some rambling excuses for me to read when she was gone, and Hugh had "broken the truth gently" to me? In mind I reluctantly followed the frail figure about the house, where I could feel that it was wandering, flitting like a lost spirit to and fro, unable to decide upon anything. I could not get away from Sarah for an instant, though the door was locked between us.

In an hour she came back and tiptoed uneasily about again. I thought I heard her breathing, but I told myself that I imagined the sound. Once more, silence. I felt faint, and began to realise that I was very hungry. I had not eaten since luncheon time yesterday, and then scarcely anything, for I had been too excited in the thought of an afternoon with Hugh at the Generalife to care for food. Now I despised myself for wanting it. It made me seem heartless, soulless; yet I longed for a glass of milk. As I lay on the bed, with the thought of milk putting other thoughts out of my head, I heard Sarah at the door for the third time. She tapped lightly, as if with the points of her fingers. My heart gave a leap, and my temples throbbed. I was no longer hungry. If I had had

the milk, the sight of it would have made me sick.

When I did not answer, she tapped more loudly than before.

"Are you awake?" she half whispered.

I lay rigid, and after waiting a minute she called out anxiously:

"Dearie, do wake up! I'm frightened about you!"

I wanted to answer, but I could not. It was impossible to speak naturally, and something would not let me cry out the horror I had of her.

She tried the door cautiously. I saw the handle turn. She had found out that it was locked. With a moan of fear, she rattled the knob, then beat on one of the panels.

"Dearie! Dearie!" she screamed. "Oh, my Lord, has anything happened to her?"

Then I had to answer, or she would go away, and get help, and people would come and break the door open.

"Nothing has happened to me," I called out, in a harsh voice, not like mine. "I can't open the door; I want to rest."

"You oughtn't to have locked yourself in," she reproached me. "You did give Sarah a fright! Couldn't you just get up a minute and slip the bolt back? Seems as if I must have one peep at you, to see you're all right, heart's dearest."

"I can't now," I persisted. "Please go away, Sarah, and leave me alone."

She was silent for an instant as if stricken by my refusal to see her.

"Your voice sounds so—so kind of strange," she said, after that slight pause during which perhaps

many thoughts, many questions had run confusedly through her mind.

"I am tired. I don't want to talk!" I cried out sharply.

But she could not give up. In the meek yet obstinate tone I knew well, and had loved and laughed at, she went on:

"You ought to have something to eat, dearie. What could you fancy? An egg beaten up in nice fresh milk?"

"No—no! Nothing!"

"Maybe you would feel different if you let me tell you about the Captin. I've seen him, and—and had a talk. He give me a message for you. Maybe there's good news. Wouldn't you like to hear it?"

"Not now."

"Dearie, you're not cross with Sarah?"

"You're making me ill! Please, please go!"

She went away, crying. I heard her make little whimpering sounds of grief. For a moment my heart softened. I half sat up, feeling I must open the door. I could not let her go like that. Then I reminded myself how she had let me suffer, not for moments but years, how she had betrayed me to spare her cowardly self. "She deserves anything," I mumbled. Yet the pitiful whimpering sounds echoed in my ears, and I felt them stinging my nerves like tiny, invisible but very sharp whips. I almost wished she would come back, and begin to plead again. Not that I would have let her in, but it seemed unbearable somehow not to know what she was doing.

Once in a while I looked at my watch, and the little white face of it said, "She gave me to you."

Well, why not? She had taken everything from me; no wonder her conscience had urged her to try

to atone. It added to her hypocrisy. There was no cause to be grateful.

I thought it very strange that I did not feel more poignantly. My emotions seemed to be shut up in some dim, dark place whence they could not call loudly enough for me to hear and understand. I could think of Sarah, hardly at all of myself or of Hugh, for more than a moment or two at a time.

Twelve o'clock came; twelve-thirty. In an hour and a half, Hugh would look for me in the arbour.

Sarah again at the door!

"Dearie, I've brought that egg and milk. I won't ask to come in. I'll just leave it and go. I've got some work to do. When you feel hungry, you open your door, and you'll find a nice little tray waitin' for you. There's just a line written on a piece of paper, tellin' you about the Captin and his news, so I won't have to bother you talkin'. But if you want me, why all you've got to do is to give one little call. I'll be in my room."

This time she did not ask for any answer. In a minute, I heard her door shut. I thought she had closed it loudly on purpose, so that I might know she was not lurking in the corridor, in case I wanted to be in the tray without being seen.

I did not go out. I had little curiosity about the line on the piece of paper. I was sure it was in accordance with the plan she had proposed to Hugh.

"Good news!" I said to myself. "There's no such thing! Even if she'd hidden away, I couldn't use her confession, and risk having her hanged. She knows very well I couldn't. She must know. It's the strongest, not the weakest, who must go to the wall. She's an old woman. I shall have to bear the shame before the world, to save her, just as I always did before

I knew for certain it wasn't mine. Hugh and I are no nearer to each other than we were—unless she dies. I won't let him tell the truth, and I won't marry him while people think me a murderess. We must wait—till she's dead; or he must give me up."

The words kept saying themselves over and over in my head. "Unless she dies . . . unless she dies. We must wait until she's dead." But, very strangely, the thought of Sarah's dying sent a pang of anguish through my heart.

I did not know why this was, or why it should be, for it was impossible for me to love her now. "She is a wicked and terrible woman, a cruel old woman," I said. Yes, cruel, and old—certainly old. Her voice had sounded very old and deadly tired. Poor little Sarah—no, wicked old Sarah . . . little old, tired Sarah.

In days long ago we could not have believed that this would happen. Days when Sarah held me on her lap, and rocked me in her arms, crooning me to sleep, singing me to sleep with, "Weep no more, my lady, weep no more for me!" . . . Sarah coming to meet me at the convent . . . Sarah. . . .

She was crying again in the next room. I could hear it through the wall, a sudden burst of sobbing, quickly stifled. I buried my head in the pillows and quivered.

Lying thus with my eyes shut, and darkness pressing upon them after the irritating brightness and heat of the sunshine, it was as if my spirit released itself from some sort of dull tyranny imposed upon it by the body. My thoughts, more than my thoughts, myself, went to Sarah in her room. My thoughts became Sarah's thoughts. Then, because they were her thoughts, they pleaded for mercy, only a little

mercy! I saw her no longer as the angel of goodness she had been in my eyes, nor as the wicked, cruel old woman who had thrown me to the wolves to save herself. I saw her a creature of weakness and of strength, weighted down by the tragic load of her cowardice.

There was no more sobbing now. The room next door was as still as mine, yet even as I felt the beating of my own heart, so did I seem to feel the beating of Sarah's, and the ache of it, as though it were in my own breast.

She was a murderess, but why? She had taken the life that was in my way. Then her dreadful courage had failed. But it had not gone out like a flame that is dead. Some spark must have lived under the ashes, must have been fanned into life again by my great need, or she could not have confessed to Hugh.

She knew that he did not like or trust her. She could not have been sure of mercy from him. He had everything to gain by giving her up, yet she had gone to him with her story.

I guessed now how she had spent what was left of the night after putting me to bed. She had been making up her mind to this step, in order, as she said, that I should not lose my happiness.

If she had not sinned, if I had not gone to prison and spent all those years there, I should never have known Hugh. I owed him to Sarah, and Sarah's cowardice. His love was the flower of my pain.

If Sarah had confessed long ago what she had done, and died for it, I could never have been happy. And was it not the truth, as she had said to Hugh, that I would have chosen prison rather than let her go to death? Yes, it must have been so. The thing once

done, she could not have saved me if she would. But now she had brought me to Hugh. She had done her best to give us to each other, and some day——

The words began to say themselves over in my head again, very quickly and mechanically, "When Sarah dies—when Sarah dies."

She was going away to-day, to leave me forever, and to hide, so that I might be free—as she thought—to marry Hugh. When she died, she would be far off, alone, without friends . . . the little old woman. But she mustn't go.

I was off the bed and at the door, unbolting it.

There was the tray, with the glass of egg and milk, covered with a glass saucer, that had a rose in it. On a plate was very thin bread and butter; and by the side of the plate a little three-cornered note, folded up, without an envelope. It was addressed in Sarah's handwriting, more shaky and indistinct than usual, "Miss Nita." But I did not stop to read. I went to her door and called, as she had called at mine; and now it was her turn not to answer.

I twisted the handle of the door. It yielded, and I pushed the door open.

Sarah was sitting at a table in the middle of the neat, bare room. Her back was turned to me, and her head was bowed down on her arms. So she must have bowed it when she gave those few strangled sobs I had heard through the wall; but she was not sobbing now. She sat quite still, tired out with grief, the little old woman who had first loved me, then wronged me, and loved me through all.

I went nearer, and looking over her shoulder saw that she had interrupted herself in the midst of writing a letter. Her arms and face were resting on it, so that even if I had tried I could not have seen what was

written; but I thought it must be the letter she had promised, for by her elbow lay an envelope addressed to "John Upwood, Esq., Manager of the North Western Bank, Kensington, London, England. Private. Urgent."

A wave of pity surged up in me, making the tears spring from my heart. I had never hated her, never for a moment, really.

I laid my hand on the bowed gray head, with its neat cap and tuft of ribbon. "How pathetic a back is," I thought, "and how defenceless it looks, somehow."

"Sarah," I said, "Sarah, dear, forgive me for not letting you in. I thought then I had something to forgive you, a very big thing and hard to forget. I heard all you said to Captain Shannon, but I *do* forgive, and I don't want you to go away. We'll bear it together, and we won't let the old love die. Oh, Sarah, Sarah, it would kill me if I couldn't love you—and I know how you have loved me."

I thought she would raise her head and look at me, that she would stretch out her arms, and that I should take her in mine. But the head lay still on the folded arms which pillowed the hidden face. Gently I slipped both my hands under her chin, and so lifted the head that I might see her face in profile. Something fell from the table—a fragment or two of thin glass which had been in her handkerchief. I knew what it was—bits of a broken phial of amyl. She had had a heart attack, and used this stuff to revive herself, as I had seen her do more than once. But now it had not been enough.

I knew that she was dead, not fainting, yet I went on talking to her as if she could hear what I said:

"Sarah, dear, I would not have let you go away.

No love could have made up to me for yours. And you haven't spoiled my life. You have given me the only things in it worth having, your love and Hugh's. I shall love you always, as long as I live, and if I am happy it will be through you. I'll make Hugh feel all this too, dear. And as I forgive you, may God forgive you, and forgive me for any pain I've caused you to-day. He will forgive you, I know."

Her face, lying on my hand, was warm still, and wet with tears. It seemed to me as I looked that it smiled up at me, and that a great peace was softly smoothing the tired lines away. I would have given all the world if I had been ten minutes sooner, yet even now I was not too late. Her spirit had lingered to take my forgiveness before it went away. I felt it near me in the room, in the bright sunlight.

I was not unhappy nor shocked, for the smile on the prim little face was too sweet; but sobs would come.

"Oh, if Hugh were here!" I cried out aloud.

Perhaps by this time he was in the garden, waiting for me. But I could not leave Sarah.

"Hugh!" I called, again and again.

I heard his footstep. He was at the door.

"She is dead," I said, "but I have forgiven her. And she knows."

Then I laid the smiling face down very gently, and let Hugh take me in his arms.

THE END.

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